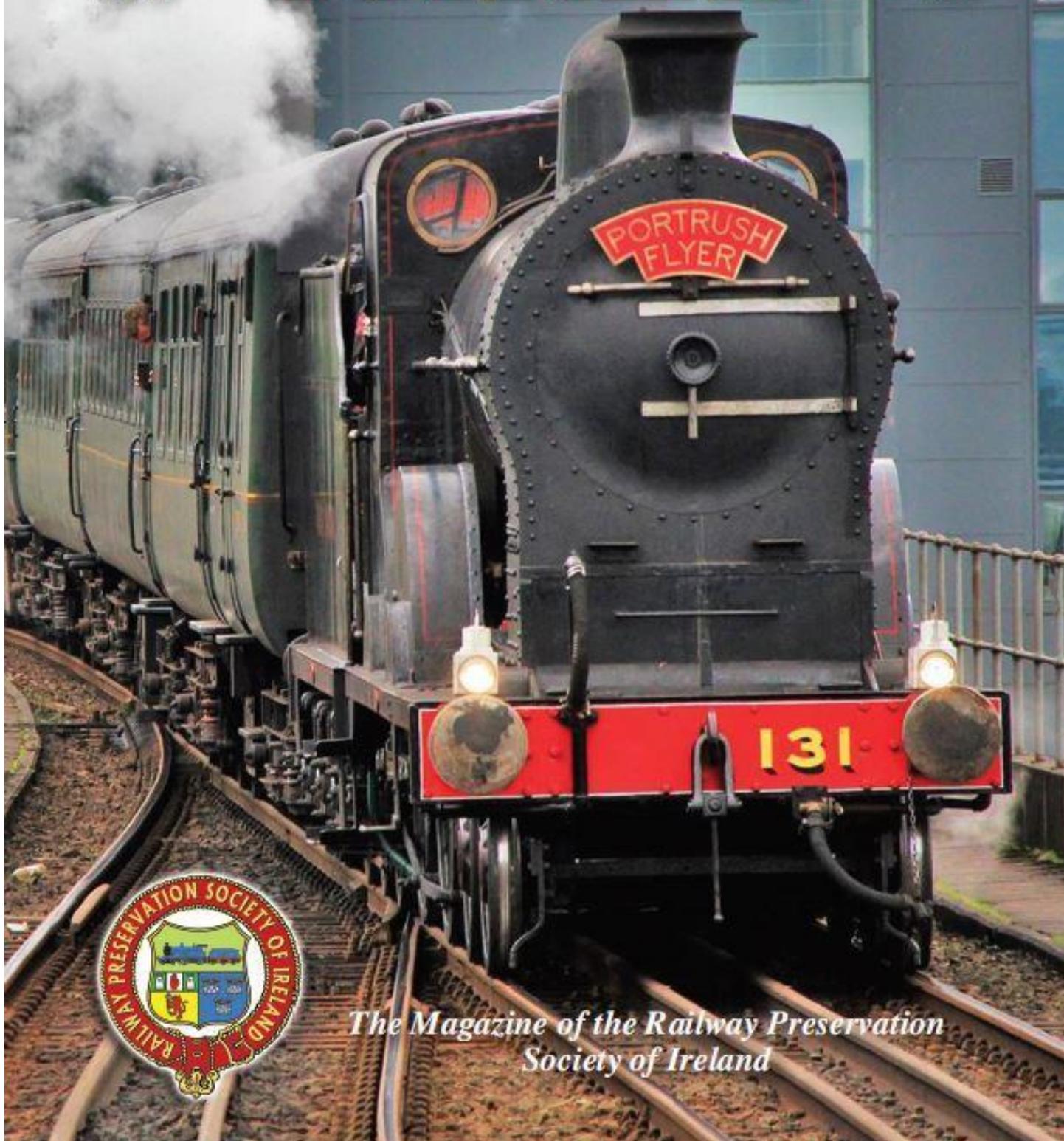


# FIVE FOOT THREE

No. 64

March  
2019



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*To contact Five Foot Three with letters, photographs or other contributions, send an email to [5ft3magazine@gmail.com](mailto:5ft3magazine@gmail.com), or write to*

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**BT38 9NA**

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*Thank you to the contributors to this magazine.*

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**COVER:** No.131 and Mk2s hurry towards Yorkgate, 19<sup>th</sup> August "Portrush Flyer" (Photo: S Ailin)

**INSIDE REAR:** No.131 with the heritage stock on her launch day, 24<sup>th</sup> March (Photo: C Friel)

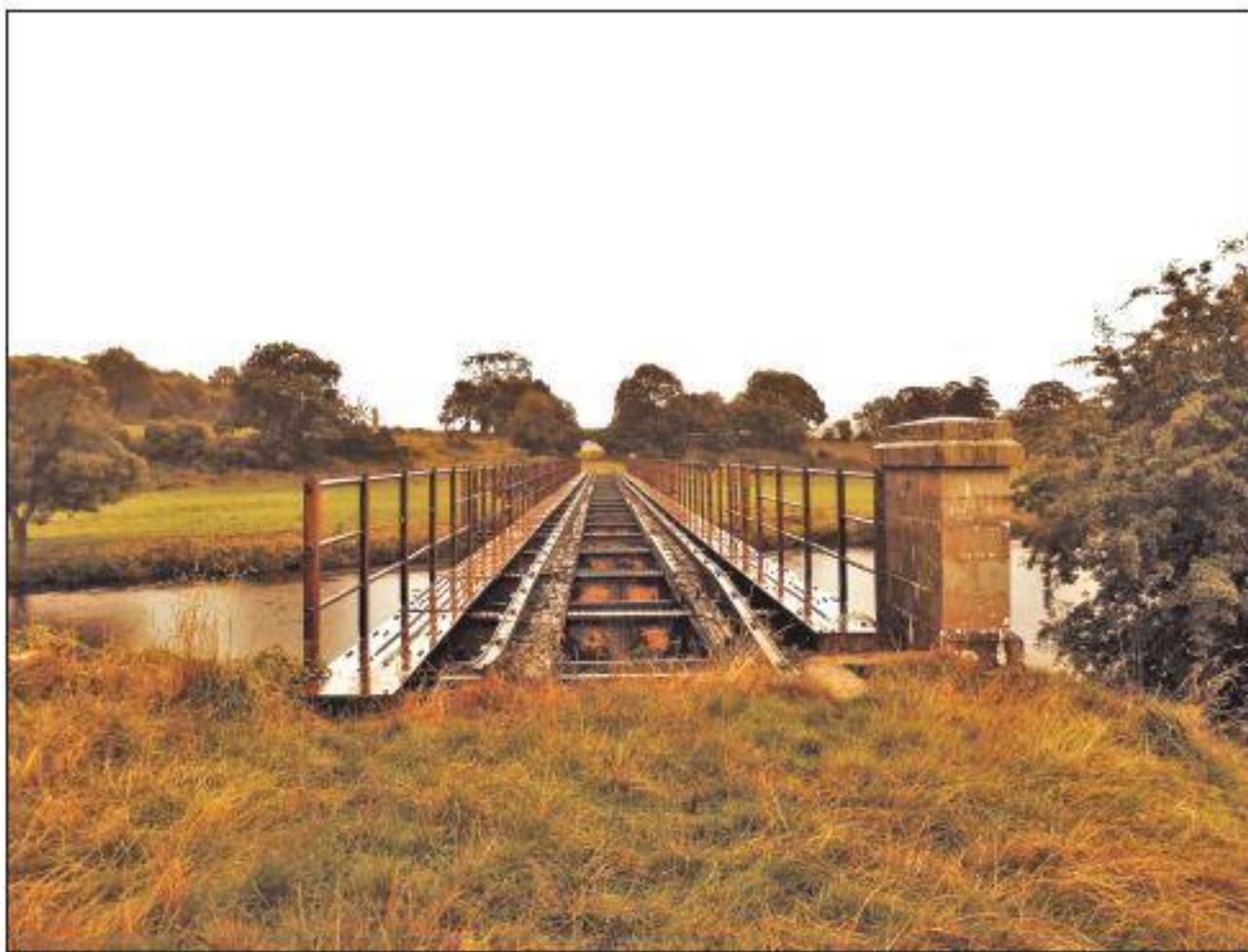
**REAR COVER:** No.4 with Cravens on "The Boyne" at Kellystown, 16<sup>th</sup> September (Photo: B Solomon)

On a thoroughly wet August day, the Editor found himself by the River Mourne, about a mile south of Sion Mills in north-west Tyrone, at the Camus Bridge on the former Derry Road of the GNR(I). Part of the fun the Editor gets from what at Whitehead has become known as 'Closed Station Gricing', is that following your nose and clues on the ground can get you to some quite impressive relics of our railway past. Is it macabre to poke a once great railway's grave? The Editor doesn't think so; he just wants to see where it all happened.

The Camus Bridge is a bog-standard steel railway bridge on iron columns but is the first bridge the Editor has seen

that declares its name proudly in the parapet of the abutment stonework. The opposite parapet declares 'Rebuilt 1911' and the bridge looks very much like it was put there with every intention that trains in our time would still travel over it. Yet in 2019 the rebuilt Camus Bridge will have spent 54 years faithfully serving all the people of this island; and 54 more as simply a peaceful backdrop to local fishermen. Whilst still solid and imposing when viewed from the sides, the decking has long since crumbled into the river.

The Editor, standing on the abutment looking across the swirling river, wondered who the last person was to



*The Camus Bridge, halfway between Victoria Bridge and Sion Mills, on 01<sup>st</sup> August, looking south over the River Mourne, MP103½ from Dundalk via Enniskillen, 56½ from Portadown. (Photo: Editor)*

have stood on both this bridge and the footplate of a GNR(I) Q-Class engine, for this was the home ground for our own No.131; the Editor is a lucky boy indeed.

In 2018, after about as many false dawns as it is possible to have, No.131 finally broke her preservation duck and hauled her first passenger train for the RPSI, the Easter Eggspress of 02<sup>nd</sup> April.

The actual restoration of the locomotive to working order seems so long ago now and may possibly even, with hindsight, be considered the easiest and most straightforward part of the process! Next came the two years or so of rebuilding the tender before it was time for a further year of electrical work described in James Friel's article in the last edition. Finally, for NIR, came midnight test runs on the Larne Line to check everything was in order.

All finally came together for No.131 on the two 'Portrush Flyers' on 12<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> August with fully commissioned electrics, increased speeds and solid performances.

Throughout the Society's lifetime the bars we must jump have become higher, more time consuming and much, much more expensive. Next up for No.131 is an Irish Rail radio, the absence of which currently prevents it from crossing the border.

Whilst others jump in and roll around and instantly declare un-dying love for No.131, the Editor approaches unfamiliar engines with a degree of trepidation, explained by the very odd machine that is No.461.

Having engaged in fisticuffs with it from

Portrush to Midleton, Dublin to Limerick and many places in between over seven years, the Editor can safely say he has given No.461 enough chances. It is not an engine with which a crew can have peace of mind, unlike the smaller but much more game No.186.

A decidedly unhelpful failure of No.461 on the last Steam & Jazz, whilst kitted up with a painstakingly fitted cylinder-indicating test rig and with days left on her boiler certificate, meant she did not get to haul that train to Belfast Central and back for purposes of investigating steam consumption. No.131 thus performed her first substitution for a fellow RPSI engine in distress.

In September and October there ensued an unwanted but necessary scramble to get No.461's boiler re-certified in No.131's slot to get the test run conducted so that the fitting of the test rig had not been a waste of time. This meant No.131 got bumped down the queue and was out of ticket when it came to working the Halloween and early Santa runs for which she was originally scheduled. Fortunately, a big blue compound engine was in the background, practically jumping up and down shouting "Pick me! Pick me!". No need for that one to prove it is Great.

No.461 did eventually get a return journey to Lanyon Place (aha) at the end of the Broomstick Belle day and at some stage someone nice may type up the results for general consumption!

Now, back to No.131. This was described by a NIR Driver to the Editor on a rather trying Santa day as "an engine with all the good points of 186, but with all the

bad points of 461". No.186 would run like a sewing machine year after year and was up for any challenge; even those where a mortal may look at the train and the route and think 'nah, that is beyond this wee biscuit tin'. Those are hugely important qualities which No.131 shows every sign of possessing. The counterbalance was that she was not steaming well that day due to clinkering.

The Editor does not equate this to the same issues as afflict the steaming of No.461 - where boiler design seems an intrinsic causal factor - for when No.131 steams, No.131 really steams.

The consensus of opinion coming through from crew reports appear to be that No.131 requires her fire in a horseshoe sort of shape (quote "back, sides and front corners; every so often one to the front to ensure there are no holes"). Clinker, however, seems as if it may have an adversely high impact on No.131 (small grate so smaller area to cover and less reserve one supposes) and at several intermediate stops on shuttle trains such as Santa, the 'EIIR Wheelbarrow' (see explanation FFT No.62 'Behind the Royal Train') carried in the van of 463 has found itself pressed into service to receive hot clinker, having first had several inches of water put in it to avoid burning through its bottom. The cycles of hard work-long stop-hard work-long stop found on shuttle trains means the fire is no sooner hot and fluid than it is cooled and the impurities set; and thus these trains seem to be much more prone to clinker than long-distance ones with only a few short stops such as Portrush Flyers.

In the Dublin area, No.85 has again been pushing the boundaries with a very long-distance foray into the foreign lands of Wicklow and Wexford. 'Dublin' have had their triumphs as always, but also unfortunately much to give them headaches, as I am sure you will soon read.

This has not prevented them from yet again bringing home the rashers. The haste with which a horrible incident such as a mainline failure can be sorted out between our on-train team and Irish Rail Operations speaks volumes for the relationships that exist there.

Rashers and much besides are also available in the delectable Edwardian Café, for Whitehead Railway Museum really got into its swing during 2018. The number of new faces in the tour guide rota is quite notable. It really does feel much more like there is something for everybody in the Society nowadays.

**OVERLEAF** – *The Editor has the privilege of sorting through many excellent and generously offered photographs; but when he opened this one his jaw hit the floor and stayed there for some time, for it is both simply stunning and the perfect continuation of his intro.*

*On Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> May, No.131 crosses the newly refurbished Crumlin Viaduct, re-built 1915, with the "131 Renaissance" Railtour.*

*How GNR(I) of old do you want?  
(Photo: M Crockett)*

*The Editor makes the footnote that all dates in this edition are for year 2018, unless a different year is specified.*



Politics is a low subject for an Editorial, but the B-word cannot escape this edition altogether and indeed Brexit may actually have happened by the time you read this. Acronyms being in fashion, the Editor coins 'WARPSI'; What About the RPSI? As the only steam train operator to cross the UK Border (14 times at least in 2018), did any of our members who voted in the 2016 referendum pause beforehand and think WARPSI?

Although with all sides expressing desire to 'keep the Irish Border open and frictionless' maybe in a round-about way we are being facilitated. Of concern, however, is the no-deal scenario and what this may mean for No.85, officially a museum artefact on loan from NMNI. For the peculiarities of loaned museum exhibits feel free to Google 'V&A Museum Brexit Concerns'. So WARPSI? Well, the Editor thinks Brexit will most

likely be nothing to worry about and business as usual and that this will eventually also be found to cover No.85, but one never knows...

Thanks, as usual, to all in Translink and Irish Rail who help us along the way.

Finally, a toast to NI Railways in its 50<sup>th</sup> Year; they are catching up with us! In the last 15 years NIR's service and track have been enormously improved over what the Editor used to use to get to university (or to get partway to; or sometimes not to get to at all depending on how the 80 or 450 in question felt). May the new Portrush and Derry / Londonderry stations serve them well. In 2013 the Editor wrote to the public consultation on Northern Ireland's future railway investment that "we cannot talk of expansion without first consolidating what we have". Consolidation is certainly happening!



*Grant's Bridge is roughly  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a mile north of the border which No.85 and the returning Steam Enterprise of 10<sup>th</sup> June crossed about 1 minute ago, defining the political buzzwords "frictionless travel". (Photo: C Friel)*

In July our AGM took place in Whitehead and when nominations for Chairman were called for, unfortunately, no other names were put forward so, once again, I found myself in the position of Chairman of the RPSI. I have to be totally personal and honest by saying it is a position which I am honoured to hold but one which can, at times, nearly cause me to run out of steam as emails flood in and dates have to be fixed for meetings. I now travel so frequently by train from Portrush to Belfast that I often rarely look out of the window - most unusual for a railway enthusiast. I am most grateful for the advice and support given to me by many long-term activists in the Society as I try to give a positive lead.

Being Chairman is an honour filled with respect and admiration for what so many do to make the Society what it is and to keep steam and heritage diesel trains running all over Ireland. The Society is blessed by amazing volunteers who give freely of their time and talent to bring pleasure to those who travel on our trains, visit our museum at Whitehead or eat in its Edwardian Tearoom. There is enthusiasm in abundance and a deep well of skills on which we can, and do, draw. Over the past year I have met representatives of the railway press and leaders of other Heritage Railways; every one of them praises what the RPSI has achieved and what it does. Our comments book at the Museum is full of compliments and many emails of

appreciation are received from happy passengers both on our trains in the north or from Dublin. It is permissible to give ourselves a pat on the back for what we have achieved.

It takes a great deal of coordination to keep everything moving smoothly. We all know about the duck swimming gently across the water as its feet are busy paddling. To mix my metaphors the trains on which the public travel are only the tip of the iceberg; underneath is a massive amount of work in the workshops restoring vintage engines and rolling stock, arranging schedules, taking bookings, cleaning coaches, lighting up locomotives in the 'wee small hours' often on dark and cold winter nights to run safe, warm, clean and comfortable trains hauled by well turned out locomotives that are fully compatible with modern railway requirements. On board we have coach stewards with bar and buffet staff keeping the bodily needs of our passengers satisfied. In addition there is the promotion of events, guiding visitors to the museum and massive amounts of paperwork for all involved to show that we are fully compliant with all legal and safety regulations. The other reports in this magazine are but a glimpse of the mountain of work and commitment involved by all concerned. Indeed, our Editor is a good example of this for he is one who gets his hands dirty with soot and oil working all hours with our locomotives as well as, metaphorically, getting them inky as he

produces this magazine.

If I can do nothing else as Chairman, I hope I can at least make every volunteer know that their hard work is valued and appreciated.

The past year has had several highlights the first of which took place well away from Ireland let alone Whitehead. The receiving of the Sir Peter Manisty Award at the Heritage Railway Association Event in Birmingham in February was the icing on the cake of the Whitehead Railway Museum. It is the Association's most prestigious award and it is only awarded by the Board of the HRA on an occasional basis for an exceptional and outstanding contribution to railway preservation. Uniquely this year there were 2 winners of this prestigious award The Swanage Railway in Dorset for

bringing back passenger services to Wareham and ourselves for "our new Museum and Engineering Facility". The plaque now proudly adorns the Museum at Whitehead.

Our member, Matthew Wilson, has been nominated for the Young Volunteer award this year. I wish him all the very best when he travels to Birmingham in February.

The restoration and return to steam of GNR No.131 after sixty years was a magical moment and one which fired the imagination of the heritage community throughout these islands. I look forward to seeing our three GNR 4-4-0s all in steam. Having mainline 4-4-0s gives us a unique selling point which brings enthusiasts from near and far to travel on our trains and visit our



Charles Friel's monthly meetings, from October-March, continue to be popular. On 12<sup>th</sup> December, Charles (left) passed responsibility for content to Siobhan Osgood and Peter Scott, who talked about Architecture of the GNR(I) and the possibility of building a new Mogul at Whitehead, respectively. John McKegney (3<sup>rd</sup> left) looks on. In November, Charles' own talk on Irish WWI ambulance trains was most fascinating. (Photo: J Friel).

Museum.

We were delighted that Northern Ireland Railways chose to mark its first half century with a first visit to Whitehead by one of its modern CAF Railcar sets carrying VIP passengers including Chief Executive Chris Conway. We were equally pleased to welcome delegates to International Rail Safety Conference who travelled up after their meeting from Dublin. A highlight of this visit was a North Korean visitor delighting in the similarity of our signal cabin with those in his country!

Closely linked to the cabin, literally, is the newly installed signal which came from Castlerock after the loop there was removed. This adds another interesting feature to the station and enriches our visitor experience now that it can be operated from the cabin. Great work by the site team at Whitehead.

A less obvious but vital highlight was the Whitehead Railway Museum's accreditation as a Museum by the NIMC - The Northern Ireland Museums Council. To receive this requires high curatorial standards and great attention to detail. Congratulations to all concerned and especially to the meticulous work carried out by Tony Ragg.

From October to March our Belfast meetings are packed to hear a rich variety of presentations arranged and

presented by Charles Friel. These meetings are a great showcase for the RPSI and we owe Charles a huge debt of gratitude for the immense work he does to keep the programme varied and interesting.

At the AGM in July Lord O'Neill stepped down as our President after fifty-four years; a role he had filled with distinction from the earliest days of the Society. He has been most helpful to me as a new Chairman and he continues to take a keen interest in the affairs of the Society. I am delighted that he has become our Patron. We had a most enjoyable dinner to mark his retirement and 'elevation'. At this event we were honoured that Lord Faulkner of Worcester, President of the Railway Heritage Association, flew over to be with us despite heavy commitments at Westminster.

Our new President, Dr Joan Smyth CBE, has been our Vice-President for some years. Joan brings a wealth of experience to the role and she plays a leading role in public life in Northern Ireland having been on the Boards of several public bodies and companies. Most significantly for us she is a former Chair of Translink and has a keen interest in railways. I am delighted that Joan accepted the Board's invitation to be President and wish her well for her term of office which she stoutly maintains will be for less than fifty-four years!



07<sup>th</sup> July was the day Lord O'Neill handed over the Presidency to Joan Smyth. (Photo: M Devlin)

The Board was sorry that Michael McMahon had to resign, for health reasons, as Treasurer after only a short time but we were delighted that Sean Clancy, a Chartered Accountant and keen volunteer member from Dublin, agreed to take on the role in September. Already his financial wisdom and vision is proving of to be inestimable benefit to the Society.

Much of the past year has been spent rationalising the structures of the Society to make them fit for purpose in accordance with a Governance Report drawn up by Dr Roger Courtney and adopted in 2017. This separates the central and crucial Board functions of Finance, Health and Safety, Human Resources, Compliance etc from the day to day running of the different parts of

the Society which is now run by Management Committees in Belfast and Dublin. The process is still evolving and two new external directors have been recruited to strengthen the Board in the vital areas of H&S and HR. It is hoped that their appointments will soon be ratified.

It is invidious to mention names in a report such as this but mention has to be made of Mrs Siobhan Dillon who accepted an invitation to become our acting general manager following the resignation of our previous General Manager, Ruth Harper. Siobhan has worked over and above the call of duty to promote the WRM and the Society. She has promoted hugely successful events such as Afternoon Teas at Whitehead and a Murder Mystery

Evening as well as communicating with our funders, notably the HLF and TNI, and business partners. The process to appoint a new full time General Manger is underway and we hope Siobhan can be with us until a replacement is in post.

Just before Christmas I was delighted to welcome Rebecca Lavery as our Museum Administrator at Whitehead. I wish Rebecca well and she is already making a very positive contribution to the life of the WRM.

One of the most satisfying aspects of the past year has been the growth in visitor numbers to the WRM and to its Edwardian Tearoom. This is only possible due to the tireless efforts of many volunteers and the efficient and welcoming Tearoom staff.

Personally I am indebted to our Secretary Paul McCann for his advice and guidance on all sorts of matters. Paul works tirelessly for the Society and never seems to flap no matter what drops on his plate. He has had particular challenges this year with clearing volunteers through Access NI and implementing the 'dreaded' GDPR.

It is not possible to make reference to all that goes on at Whitehead, in Dublin or in committees but I want to stress how impressed I am by all that is done by so many and often barely noticed. I'm still learning and finding my way!

For the RPSI to continue to be successful it needs more people to join in the fun and become volunteers. There are a myriad of jobs to be done and all sorts of skills can be used. Do not hesitate to offer your services and your time. We

work strongest when we function as a team and it is my aim to see that all of us who love trains and who belong to this great family of the RPSI work together in harmony.

As Chairman I am delighted at the excellent cooperation we enjoy with both Translink Northern Ireland Railways and Iarnród Éireann and for the encouragement and support they give us. Quite simply without this the RPSI would not function. Enthusiast specials, Santa trains and Steam & Jazz Trains to name but a few are far removed from the running of modern railways but, thankfully, both IE and NIR seem to embrace them with aplomb.

The RPSI has achieved miracles in its first fifty-four years. With your help and all those involved in all aspects of the Society there is no reason for the future years to be any different.

Following the upheavals - financial, personnel and governance - of the previous year, 2018 was more a year of consolidation. But there is still much to be done to get the Society's management structure in a form that will allow us to deal with our increased responsibilities, i.e. the Whitehead Railway Museum and staffing - and that's before a single train runs.

As always, despite the best of intentions, self-imposed deadlines slip past!

**Board:** During the year the Board said goodbye to Michael McMahon, who stepped down as Treasurer for health reasons. Likewise, we said goodbye (and a big Thank You) to Edward Friel, Bill Garrioch and Mark Walsh.

We were fortunate that Seán Clancy gave in to persuasion and took on the role of Treasurer. However, no amount of arm twisting could see the Vice-Chair post being filled - we are still open to offers!

We welcome two new directors, with Mark Kennedy and Peter Rigney joining.

Thus, at present, the governing board is:

**Chairman:** John McKeown

**Vice-Chairman:**

**Secretary:** Paul McCann

**Treasurer:** Seán Clancy

**Directors:** Eileen Armstrong

Mervyn Darragh

Mark Kennedy

Dermot Mackie

Fergus McDonnell

Joe McKeown

Phillip Newell

Peter Rigney

Peter Scott

At the AGM, we paid a fond farewell to Lord O'Neill as President and welcomed Joan Smyth into the post. Happily, Lord O'Neill will remain as Society Patron.

**Developments:** General Manger Ruth Harper resigned in March and Siobhan Dillion, who had been Project Director for the WRM then acting in the role of General Manger, remained for the rest of the year. Siobhan has made a tremendous contribution to the success of the Museum during the year, ironing out a multitude of teething problems and, with the Event Committee's help, establishing the Museum as an exciting destination for casual and organised visits. The afternoon teas and murder mystery events were especial successes.

Siobhan was joined in the latter part of the year by new Museum Administrator Rebecca Laverty, who hit the ground running and has made a significant contribution already to the successful Christmas season at Whitehead.

The Museum has been marketed heavily during the year and the effort is slowly bearing fruit. Tours are still mainly at

arranged times in the company of a tour guide, but moves are afoot to allow visitors to 'self guide'.

The café, now titled The Edwardian Tea Room, continues to get excellent reviews, so well done to Sam and Martin, and their staff.

Connolly Shed has continued to be an excellent facility in Dublin. And in November a site meeting was held with CIÉ Properties to begin working on a proposal which will encompass Inchicore, Connolly Shed and Mullingar. During the year it was announced that the latter premises will be developed for social housing. While we will lose the use of the shed, the turntable is to remain connected and operational.

**Governance:** During the year Belfast and Dublin Management Committees were established and these were outlined by the Chairman in the December News-Letter. For those interested the management

organisation chart is available on the Members Section of the website.

As the Chairman explained, we hope to recruit new directors with specific experience in, among other areas, Human resources.

**Finance:** As always, money is a worry; usually not in raising it - that is never really a problem. No, the problem is in how quickly it gets spent, on an ever-increasing variety of items, at ever-increasing cost! The new Treasurer and the Finance Committee continue to work wonders in keeping the proverbial heads above water.

The core business of running trains continues to be successful, with most trains sold out well in advance. Fund-raising on these trains goes a long way to helping profitability too.

**Insurance:** This is the largest annual expense which we have, being in the region of £73,000 (work out the cost per train operated!). Our date of renewal for



No.131 gets two thumbs up from RPSI Loco Rep David Orr on Easter Tuesday, 03<sup>rd</sup> April, as it accelerates tender-first through "pelting" rain at Fortwilliam. As Murphy's Law would have it, the cage that fills the gap between tender top and cab roof was still under construction, so the protective tarpaulin that lashes to it in wet weather could not be deployed; the NIR crew are largely hidden as they press themselves back under the half-roof, tight against the warm dry boiler. (Photo: M Crockett)

all insurances (there are about 12 different policies) is 1<sup>st</sup> November. This year we were dismayed to learn that our primary Public Liability insurer was no longer willing to cover us. As we cannot operate trains without insurance cover, and as the Christmas season was approaching, this was very disturbing news. All the Dublin trains had been sold out weeks before, and the Belfast trains were about to go on sale but now had to be delayed.

It is fair to say that there are not a lot of insurers in the market for covering risks such as ours, and so it is to the credit of Darren Ross of our brokers, Marsh, that he was able to negotiate terms with a new insurer - and at a slightly reduced premium too! The RPSI is very grateful; a very successful Santa season ensued!

**Volunteers:** The most essential asset of the Society is our pool of volunteers and we were delighted to welcome more new faces this year. At present we are without a Volunteer Co-ordinator, and we would appeal for someone who thinks they could help in this area.

**General:** It will be reported on elsewhere, but it was good to see locomotive No.131 hauling its first public trains early in the year. Likewise, we are looking forward to diesel B134 emerging.

The Society were honoured by the Heritage Railway Association in February, jointly winning their Manisty Award as "recognition of the contribution made by RPSI and Whitehead Railway Museum to railway heritage in Ireland and a tribute to all those volunteers who have made such a

contribution over many years."

Last year the new website was reported on. It was noted that its focus was mainly on the general public and not on railway enthusiast members. Happily, this was addressed during the last year when a new Members section came into use. This allows members to access a password-protected area where most of the enthusiast-based content from the old website can once again be viewed. Suggestions as to how this facility may be further developed are welcome.

Marketing now relies heavily on the separate Twitter pages for the RPSI and Whitehead Railway Museum. Also, Facebook pages exist separately for the main Society, Dublin and the Museum. Plus, the public email list, with nearly 6,000 email addresses, helps to sell our trains without resort to paid advertising.

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was a bit of an administration burden during the year. Depending on what you read, it was not always clear what steps, if any, the RPSI had to take to comply. The upshot was that we decided to ask all members to confirm their willingness to receive communications from us. If your email Bulletins stopped around May 2018, then that would be the reason. If you have not yet communicated your confirmation to us you are urged to do so!

**Members:** For the second year there was a small but pleasing increase in membership numbers - up from 1,010 to 1,020. Out of interest, our members come from Northern Ireland (41%), Republic of Ireland (32%) and Great

Britain (24%), the rest being mainly Australia and the USA.

**Thank You:** As always to all who have served on the Board throughout the year. A lot of non-train running work goes on behind the scenes so thank you to all who served on one (or more) of the various sub-committees. Members of the Curatorial Committee were especially busy overseeing the interpretative content of the Museum, and they were rewarded when the Museum gained re-accreditation as a registered museum during the year. Likewise, the Events Committee were busy showcasing the Museum and Edwardian Tea Room.

The Posts of Special Responsibility to the Secretary for the year were: Charles

Friel (Belfast Meetings); Mark Kennedy (Curatorial Adviser); Ciaran McAteer (Legal Advisor); Barry Carse (Dublin area membership queries).

Once more, thank-you to the management and crews of the railway companies, NI Railways and Iarnród Éireann, for their help in making the trains the success they were in 2018! And congratulations to NIR on their 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary back in April.

At this stage, I would like to thank Lord O'Neill for his help in chairing General Meetings throughout my time as Honorary Secretary. He was never less than a pleasure to work with and was incredibly supportive to me. Happy retirement.



No.85 had certainly put a smile on the faces of (L to R) Connie O'Gara, Bill White, Ken Fox, Robbie Jolley, Chris Ragg, Lar Griffin and Matthew Crockett by the time it reached Charleville on the outbound 'Cork & Kerry' May Tour on 12<sup>th</sup> May. (Photo: C Friel)

**No.4 LMSNCC WT-class 2-6-4T mixed traffic loco, 1947.**

Following replacement of its boiler flue tubes last year, No.4 has continued to be based in Dublin and has operated normally with one or two minor exceptions. As mentioned in last year's report, the tyres are due for replacement and the loco has now returned to Whitehead so that this work can progress. The tyres have already been supplied by Messrs Ringrollers of South Africa. The new tyres were ordered partly machined, so that the bore can be completed once the diameter of the wheel centre is known. That can only be established when the wheelsets have been removed from the loco and the old tyres taken off, so that the condition and diameter of the wheel centre is accessible. Other overhaul work is planned as well and a concentrated effort will be needed to have the loco available for the 2019 May tour. No 4 is now kitted out with the Irish Rail train radio – the first of our steam locos to be fitted. The principle reason for the radio is to enable emergency instructions to be conveyed immediately to a train driver without having to rely on lineside signals. Effective mounting of yet more electronic equipment in the harsh atmosphere and restricted space of a steam loco cab presents an increasing challenge. *[Someone, slightly frustrated, wanted me to put in the Editorial that*

*everything required to tell the driver a signal aspect seems to be required to be in that driver's eyeline bar the window and the signal. I feel it fits better here instead and I get the deciding vote – Ed]*

**No.85 GNR(I) V-class 4-4-0 compound express passenger loco "Merlin", 1932.**

Examination of boiler tubes in December 2017 revealed isolated pitting corrosion, some of which was severe, and it was decided in the interests of reliability to renew all the tubes. This was carried out promptly by Heritage Engineering Ireland (The RPSI engineering subsidiary) at Whitehead. The tubes will hopefully last until 2023 when the 10-year boiler overhaul is due.

**No.131 GNR(I) Q-class 4-4-0 express passenger loco, 1901 rebuilt 1920.**

No.131 has finally entered traffic and has reached its former familiar territory at Portadown – although the layout there is greatly changed since No.131 last saw it. No.131 has also been to the less familiar territory of Coleraine on the Portrush Flyer – which did not actually go as far as Portrush for reasons outside our control. Performance has certainly lived up to expectations. The loco is currently going through the formalities of acceptance by the Commission for Railway Regulation, for operation on Irish Rail lines. Also, the Irish Rail train radio is to be fitted.



January is often *Monster Shunt* month and, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of same, 3BG shunts 'Meenglas' on a well wagon into the workshop for cosmetic surgery. Behind 3BG is 'Drumboe's boiler; her frames are under the tarpaulin, on their own transporter wagon behind 'Meenglas'. (Photo: C Friel)

The smaller GNRI locos have a compact cab which means that accommodation for the new electrics together with tools and enginemen's gear is a challenge.

#### **No.171 GNR(I) S-class 4-4-0 express passenger loco, 1913 rebuilt 1938.**

Some work has continued on No.171, for example fitting of some of the AWS equipment at the same time as the similar job on No.131. Thanks to the generosity of Thales Ground Transportation Systems, the "First in Class" TPWS validation testing was carried out on both Nos.171 and 131 on the same day in May 2018 at no cost to the RPSI. A new valve liner is being prepared for fitting. One reason for not pressing ahead faster is that we need to

plan for a basic number of locos in traffic at any one time, together with at least one undergoing overhaul. Rushing to get No.171 into traffic would give us too many locos now and not enough in several years' time. However, those who contributed to the 171 appeal can rest assured that most of the work is already completed. Outstanding items are tender springs, boiler tubes and crown stays – not to mention the now mandatory AWS-TPWS, IE train radio, electric lights etc.

#### **No.461 DSER K2-class 2-6-0 goods engine, 1922.**

Loco No.461 came out of traffic at the end of 2018 and requires overhaul of the boiler plus mechanical attention. At

the time of writing, a decision is pending whether to proceed now or to retire the loco for a period. Because of the variable performance put up by No.461, an interesting investigation was carried out by fitting indicator equipment - this monitors steam pressure distribution in the cylinders at various speeds, cut-off and regulator settings and should show up any problems. Results have shown no single factor to be accountable for the intermittent performance. The best explanation is probably a combination of the 1940s class "N" boiler with reduced heating surface and maximum pressure, and the now unusual design of piston valves which are known to be prone to leakage. These factors alone cannot explain the perception that the locomotive was steaming more poorly than when first overhauled by the RPSI in the 1980s. The loco is fitted with Schmidt 8" piston valves - a design which was fairly widespread in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century but which fell out of favour in the 1920s when multiple ring valve heads came into use. The loco is fitted with Schmidt 8" piston valves - a design which was fairly widespread in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century but now superseded.

#### Locos in store

#### **No.186 GSWR J15-class 0-6-0 goods loco, 1879, rebuilt with Z class boiler.**

No.186 continues to occupy a prime slot as a Museum exhibit. Undoubtedly one of our most popular and reliable locos, No.186 is useful for moderate trains at moderate speeds over short distances and absence from traffic is hopefully

temporary.

#### **No.184 GSWR J15-class 0-6-0 goods loco, 1880.**

No.184 is in a partly dismantled state and is a rather dismal sight - a far cry from its glory days when it was a major member of the cast - along with Sean Connery - for the filming of "The First Great Train Robbery" in the late 1970's. The loco is at present in the new section of the loco shed, where it is in full view for visitors - hopefully everyone who sees it understands that this is the condition in which items are acquired rather than the way we would like them to be seen. Maybe someday it could be restored to action - it is in practically original condition and would only need reinstatement of the sloping smokebox front with its double doors to take us back to the 1880's. Of course TPWS, Irish Rail train radio, electric lamps.....

#### **SLNCR 0-6-4 mixed traffic loco "Lough Erne". (Later numbered 27 by Ulster Transport Authority)**

No.27 is also in the loco shed but not easily seen past No.184. It is also in dismal condition and requires extensive overhaul if it were to return to traffic. It has however found a useful niche storing in its bunker the footballs that our neighbours, the Whitehead Eagles, manage to hoof over the ballproof fence. These are regularly retrieved from the gorse on the bank opposite the platform using the fireirons of shunting locomotives, before a spell in No.27. When there are enough to justify, the Eagles are summoned to collect.



30 years after No.184 last steamed in 1988, Andrew Davidson waves her towards the engine shed on 21<sup>st</sup> January. Her tender watches approvingly, from the Larne Siding behind Andrew. (Photo: Editor)

#### Shunting locos

##### **No.3 Guinness 0-4-0ST shunting loco, 1919, aka "3BG"**

In traffic as Whitehead shunter.

##### **No.3 Londonderry Port and Harbour 0-6-0 shunting loco, 1928. (Popularly "Harvey")**

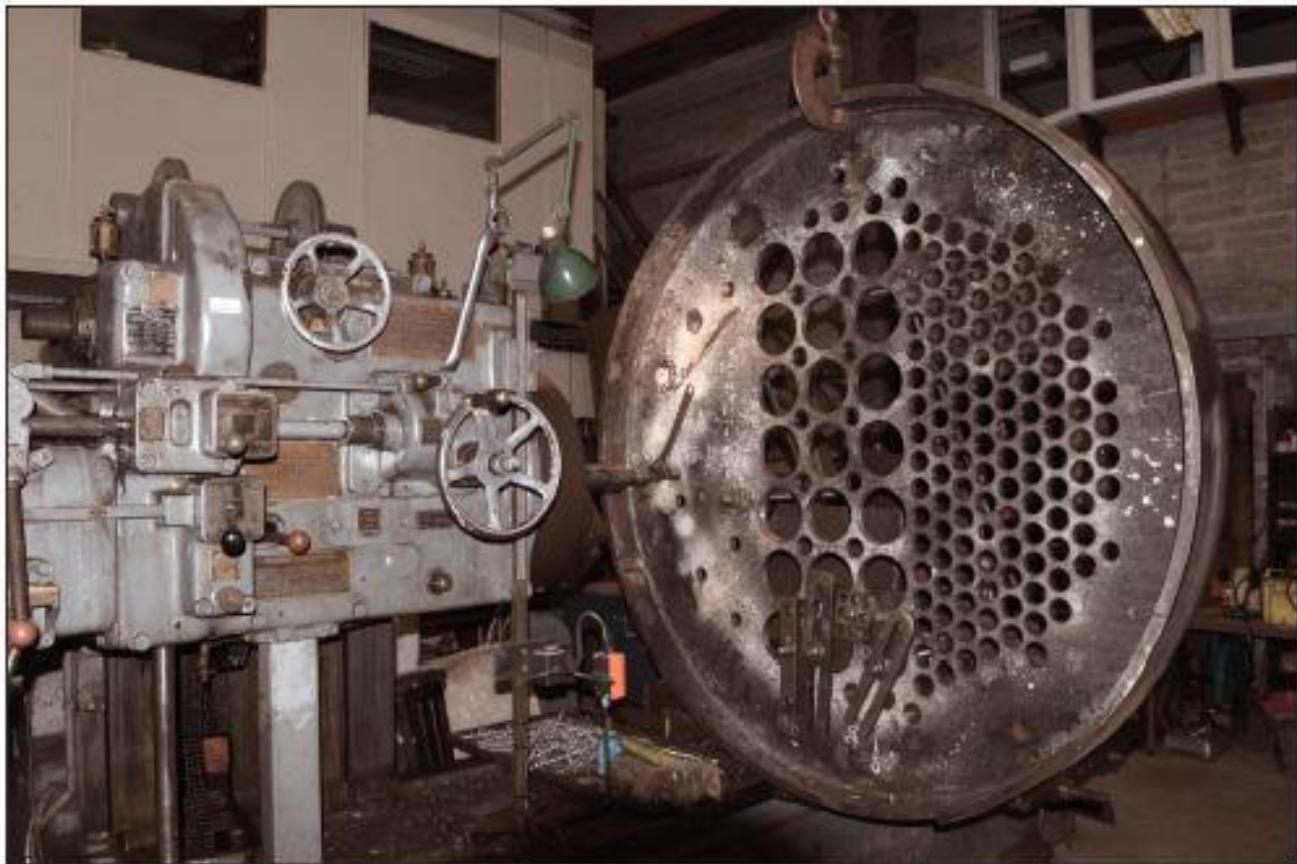
Receiving basic exterior restoration for museum display, pending eventual return to traffic as Whitehead shunter. When operating as shunter in Derry, the loco ran on mixed 5ft 3 and 3ft gauge track and was equipped with 3ft gauge couplers as well as the standard drawbars. These were removed for safety reasons while shunting at

Whitehead, but one has now been reinstated for display purposes.

County Donegal Railway Class 5, 2-6-4T locos 1907.

**No.4 Meenglas** – Cosmetic work is now almost complete and the loco should shortly be returned to the Railway Museum in Derry.

**No.5 Drumboe** – It is hoped that further restoration work can be carried out to enable the loco to be reassembled and returned to Donegal for display purposes. Extensive rebuilding of the cab and coal bunker would be essential. All work carried out to Drumboe has been to operational standards.



*Tapping steam pipe stud holes in the smokebox tubeplate of the second NCC boiler on 27<sup>th</sup> October. (Photo: B Hill)*

#### **NCC Loco Project:**

Work is continuing on the rebuilding of boiler G8.24. This boiler will double as a spare for loco No.4 or for the second loco development. Completed so far are the inner firebox door plate and tube plate, the foundation ring, and the front tubeplate. Flanging of the outer steel door plate is under way. As to the second loco, the RPSI has approved this in principle and some progress has already been made. New tyres were ordered along with the tyres for loco No.4, since if this opportunity was missed then a separate order later on would have incurred avoidable expensive. Most of the drawings are available and are being electronically stored. The existing spare parts are

being collected together in the new Whitehead storage facility. (We actually have something like 1/4 of the value of the loco in existing parts).

The first of major items in 2018 was the removal of 134's radiator unit. This went to a specialist contractor who rebuilt the complete unit with new parts coming from the USA.

The locomotive axles, once removed from the bogies, underwent extensive tests which revealed that they were not suitable for further use and replacement axles were sourced within Inchicore Works. Removal of the old wheels and bull gear from the axles was an extremely tedious and precise operation, carried out successfully in Inchicore Works without damage and the parts will now be placed on the new axle.

Various parts of the locomotive body and bonnet were then removed to allow access to facilitate the complete removal of the bonnet. This was carried out with the aid of a specialist contractor, James Brennan, who donated his time and equipment free of charge to the Society as a contribution to the project. For this the RPSI would like to express our sincere thanks.

The main and auxiliary generator were then removed and went to the company who rebuilt the traction motors. John Gray and his CME team in the FCR shop

wasted no time and got stuck in to the cab. One of the first tasks was to reinstate the cab window apertures over the bonnet. These were done away with during the 121 class's final body overhaul. Soon after several critical items were removed for overhaul as part of the structured restoration project. These included the oil cooler and the air compressor/exhauster unit. The oil cooler went to specialist contractor, Michael O'Connor at Kilcock Radiators, where it was stripped and overhauled. It returned as good as new to the Inchicore workshop ready to be refitted.

The air compressor/exhauster was rebuilt internally by the CME staff in the Locomotive Overhaul shop. Yet again, the pride and commitment of the Inchicore staff to this project was displayed with the unit being turned around without delay.

The auxiliary generators, which provide power from the engine to the traction motors, were then returned as good as when first constructed and will provide many, many years of reliable operation.

There is not a single item on the bogies that has gone untouched. The bogie frames underwent vigorous testing which thankfully showed up very little that gave concern.



*With a nice new axle, with nice new wheels and refurbished bullgear on it, above his head; Fitter Oliver Dunne checks the clearance of the newly fitted axles on bogie No2 from 134. (Photo: G Mooney)*

134's axles, once removed from the bogies, underwent extensive tests which revealed that they were not suitable for further use and replacement axles were sourced within Inchicore Works. Removal of the old wheels and bull gear from the axles was an extremely tedious and precise operation, carried out successfully in Inchicore Works without damage and the parts will now be placed on the new axle. The only item from this area to be used again was the toothed bullgear which was overhauled and then placed on the new axles. All wheels were replaced with brand new ones.

The brake linkage was well worn and required a lot of attention. Every single bushing was renewed along with the wear plates and all bearings. The brake cylinders were in a very bad way and required a complete rebuild. All seals and linkages and practically every nut and bolt were replaced with new and torqued to specification. Fitter Oliver Dunne applied his expert knowledge to the job along with other members of the team under the supervision of manager Brian Goold. The level of work put into the bogies will ensure a very long and reliable career for them at the head of our trains.



*The 'Branchline Wanderer' is seen at the Commons, Kilkenny on 07<sup>th</sup> April with 071 in charge. This railtour, among others, raised much of the money towards funding 134's overhaul. (Photo: F O'Neill)*

The bogies were then transferred back to the FCR where the team under John Gray and JP Creagh were ready to reunite the locomotive and bogies, prior to which work continued with the installation of the auxiliary generator. The locomotive was carefully raised the accommodation bogies removed and the refurbed ones rolled in. Connection of the traction motors and other items to the bogies took place and 134 was moved for the next part of the restoration to commence.

134 then moved to 'The Ramps' facility for the overhaul of the body and structure as some was not in good order. A full set of drawings has been compiled and the fabrication of new materials is well under way. It is planned that over the coming months the body

and structural rebuild will be complete allowing 134 to move ever closer to its mainline return.

The RPSI would like to express sincere gratitude to Irish Rail CME Peter Smyth and his entire CME team in Inchicore for their unreserved assistance and enthusiasm with 134. Our dedicated IE project manager Stephen Campbell has in particular ensured the work is progressing in a very structured and organised manner. Without all of their support, this project simply would not happen.

**23 'Planet' – ex Irish Shell, built by FC Hibberd & Co. In store.**

Status unchanged for the past decade or so.

**No 1 ex COMHLUCHT SIÚCRE ÉIREANN (Irish Sugar) 'Carlow Diesel', 88DS built by Ruston Hornsby. In traffic.**

Carlow was moved from 5 road during a very long and wet shunt early January 2018, when it went to the back of A-road in the carriage shed. Over the (very) cold winter the locomotive was sanded and prepared for paint. It was then painted in the original livery of Brunswick Green with Yellow lining and numbers.

Mechanically, the locomotive moved under its own power during the summer, but problems with the main compressor have prevented the locomotive being pressed in to service. Initial testing has been favourable concerning the gearbox repairs and the main engine runs like a sewing machine, albeit a somewhat smoky one. Injectors may need attention in the near future.

The petrol 'donkey' engine has also been as stubborn as its animal namesake due to a problem with the magneto, then the carburettor and, most recently, the spark plug. However, all minor problems which are not insurmountable.

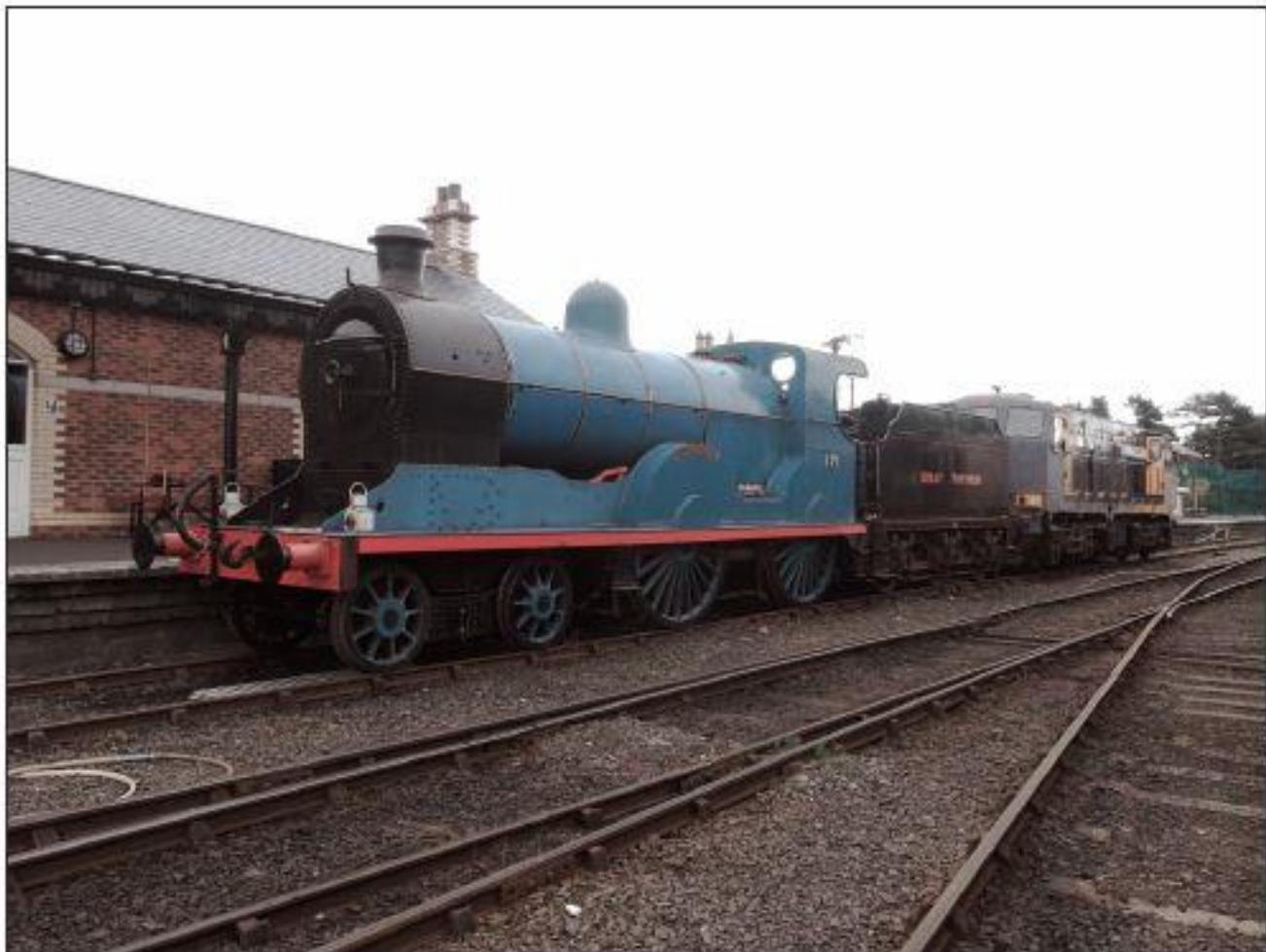
**142 – ex CIE/IE, built by General Motors Electro-Motive Division (EMD) La Grange, Illinois. In traffic.**

After some struggles starting in Feb/March 142 has since remained reliable. A set of five truck batteries were sourced and fitted, along with new link cables and battery terminals. These were installed around Easter.

May saw 142 being the motive power for Nos.131 and 171's TPWS testing. The steam locos were propelled to at least 10mph before maintaining a steady speed across the test equipment, followed by a brisk stop. The GM ran well all day and was certainly well warmed up by the end of its duty!

July was 142's time to shine on the silver screen. It and a shortened Mk2 rake was used for the filming of "Normal People". This involved many departures from the station along the platform road, while multiple thousands of pounds worth of camera gear hung off the side of a coach to film the departure. Again, a long 14-hour duty for the locomotive and her crew.

142 has spent most of the year in undercoat, though one side is now a neat charcoal grey applied for its starring role in July by members of the Site Squad. The other side is in orange undercoat.



142 propels No.171, who is wearing No.131's tender, her own as yet being un-electrified, on 21<sup>st</sup> May. Each new class of engine fitted with TPWS must go through a "First of Class" test to prove that the aerial on the locomotive, which picks up the signal aspect from a grid in the track seen under the bufferbeam, is performing correctly. (Photo: J Friel)

Painting was delayed as it was decided to fix the cracked windows, which were professionally and economically replaced by Plantglass, Newtownabbey, and repair some bodywork which collapsed during door frame adjustments on No.2 cab. Effected bodywork was cut out and replaced, along with surrounding areas that were similarly corroded. This also involved replacing the flooring in the same cab, and applying new lino kindly supplied by an anonymous donor. These repairs were carried out by HEI between August and October.

As of writing, the locomotive is back in

general traffic until final painting happens when the weather improves.

Once painting is complete safety upgrades are required to return the locomotive to mainline duty – it needs Irish Rail and NIR radios, updated and reactivated, and would require AWS/TPWS fitted. We do have some of the equipment in stock, recovered from the NIR 450 Castle class DMU scrapped in Ballymena a few years ago. The CAWS system would also need reactivated for use on Irish Rail metals.

The Diesel Loco Officer would like to thank the Site Squad and Steam

Locomotive Dept for their help at various points throughout the year, to HEI (particularly Jim Adams) for their work on the bodywork, plus our friends in Dublin Ops and Irish Rail for sourcing documentation, drawings, and indeed various parts.

Finally, a big thanks to The Modern Railway Society Ireland (MRSI) who's generous donations paid for new batteries for 142 and went a long way towards paying for the bodywork repairs and paint.

#### **Unilok Road/Rail Shunter.** In traffic

This odd contraption has been out of use for probably a decade at least, but it was decided it would be a useful machine to assist in shunting No.4 in the confines of the Wheeldrop shed while those wheelsets are removed for replacement of tyres.

As I'm sure some readers are aware, the Unilok's main motive power is the engine and transaxle from a 1960's VW Beetle. Sometime in the past the original 1200cc engine was removed and a 1500cc version installed. However, with many years of storage, the complete fuel system had rotted – fuel lines, fuel pump etc. The engine drive belts were also split or broken.

Replacement belts and fuel lines were obtained, and a fuel pump rebuild kit used to refurbish the original pump. These engines use many similar but marginally different pumps, which makes identifying the correct new replacement difficult at best. The carb, distributor and dynamo were all stripped, serviced and rebuilt.

It is intended to give the machine a quick tidy-up painting in the summer and address various other minor issues like tatty wiring, fixing the roof, replacement exhaust silencer, which should make this little machine reliable.

#### **Crew Thoughts.**

Currently the RPSI has only five 'full' diesel drivers, so we are currently training three additional drivers. However, this process is slow due to crew availability, locomotive availability, and this year's low number of rostered shunts using the GM. It is hoped that these issues will be overcome in 2019 and we will have a stronger number of drivers available.

Keen volunteers are welcomed to join the diesel squad – we need people! If you like painting, welding bodywork, or have a general mechanical knowledge, then you're welcome. Working with diesel engines of all sizes, from 2.5litres to 80litres, prior knowledge is not required but any is welcomed. We tend to work mainly on Saturdays and work is rarely strenuous. If you'd like to join to be a driver, you will need to become a passed Shunter at Whitehead before commencing driver training. We do ask members of the diesel crew to participate in steam operations whenever possible.

If you'd like to join us, please apply via the normal volunteer application process, noting your interest in Whitehead Diesels.

Looking back on the last year, the Society have managed to field a 7-coach train, which ran without incident and provided a reasonably comfortable area to sit in while surveying the passing countryside. However, the various operating committees and the Board have said that this is all very well, 'but we need eight vehicles'. This can only be achieved with increased volunteer input, which is very hard to achieve as every department is crying out for additional resources, and maybe a serious rethink in Society priorities.

At the moment work is continuing on one of our 64-seater TSOs, 302. Work to date has involved gangway overhaul, side body repairs, floor renewal and bogie overhaul. The plan is to re-upholster the seats in January and start re-assembling everything so that the coach is ready for Easter. 302 will replace carriage 301, which was withdrawn for overhaul on 01<sup>st</sup> January 2019.

In the background, work has been progressing on 181, a first-class side corridor, identical to 180. This coach has been worked on over the last five years or so and is now very close to entering traffic. Work to date has involved deep cleaning the interior, brake overhaul, side body and roof repairs and extensive work to the doors. As the Editor will remind me – I have been saying we'll see this vehicle enter traffic for the last 2-3 years, so I guess we'll see what happens. *[Whilst the Editor certainly says many things and often far too hastily, he does not think he commented on 181. He*

*did forget it existed for a few years and was somewhat surprised to find it suddenly being furiously beavered at! – Ed]*

Meanwhile ex CIE MK2d coach 304 is almost ready for its undercoat. Internally the seats have been fitted and the cushions re-upholstered. The vacuum brake gear has all been refurbished and HEI have completed fitting a through steam heat pipe to the vehicle. The RPSI Central Door Lock system has also been fitted and commissioned in addition to re-wiring for the RPSI Train Line system. The last major items are the two gangways ends which need overhauled and the rubber curtains renewed. Unfortunately, a complication was lately encountered with the electrical control gear for the air conditioning system. If by chance you are an air conditioning engineer/ refrigerant specialist with a sympathetic ear – please get in touch! We hope that this can be addressed in the first quarter of 2019.

During the year window rubber and glass were purchased for GNRI brake 114 which currently looks a tad dilapidated. These were bought with the intention of re-glazing the vehicle and repainting the vehicle in blue and cream, however this worthy project has had to be temporarily shelved due to lack of volunteers.

If you care to take a moment to review carriage reports of the past it is clear the Society has always suffered a lack of C&W volunteers at Whitehead. From a



*Joe Cassells is on the receiving end of the lens for once, as he cleans the windows of 301 on 04<sup>th</sup> April, prior to the 'NIR 50' train. (Photo: C Friel)*

purely practical point of view it is hard to see why, as most of the working area is now under a roof and is heated. We have a range of machinery and tools to undertake most of the work in house; only subcontracting where absolutely necessary. There are a range of tasks and vehicles to work on – it is not 'just painting Mk2s'. It is possible many do not realise the range of activities undertaken on the average weekend – these range from heavy bogie overhaul, to dismantling seats, to cutting out rotten material, to dismantling brake gear, to welding, greasing axleboxes, painting, wiring, plumbing, joinery and a lot more besides. It is not confined to Mk2s either, as we have recently overhauled the oil tank wagon and GSWR ballast wagon.

There are yet more challenges and hurdles that are rapidly approaching the Society. These threaten the viability of running a fleet of carriages, which in turns threatens the whole existence of the organisation. We have met similar challenges before, due to the skilled capabilities and professionalism of individuals within the Society and whilst these latest challenges are navigable, they will come with a horrendously massive price tag and impracticality factor. *[The Carriage Officer does not bite and buys his round in the pub; he deserves your help and support. – Ed]*

A second catering vehicle is currently being examined in greater detail, though will probably require a 'new to us' donor vehicle being acquired. In an already packed yard, it is anyone's guess where it could be stored.

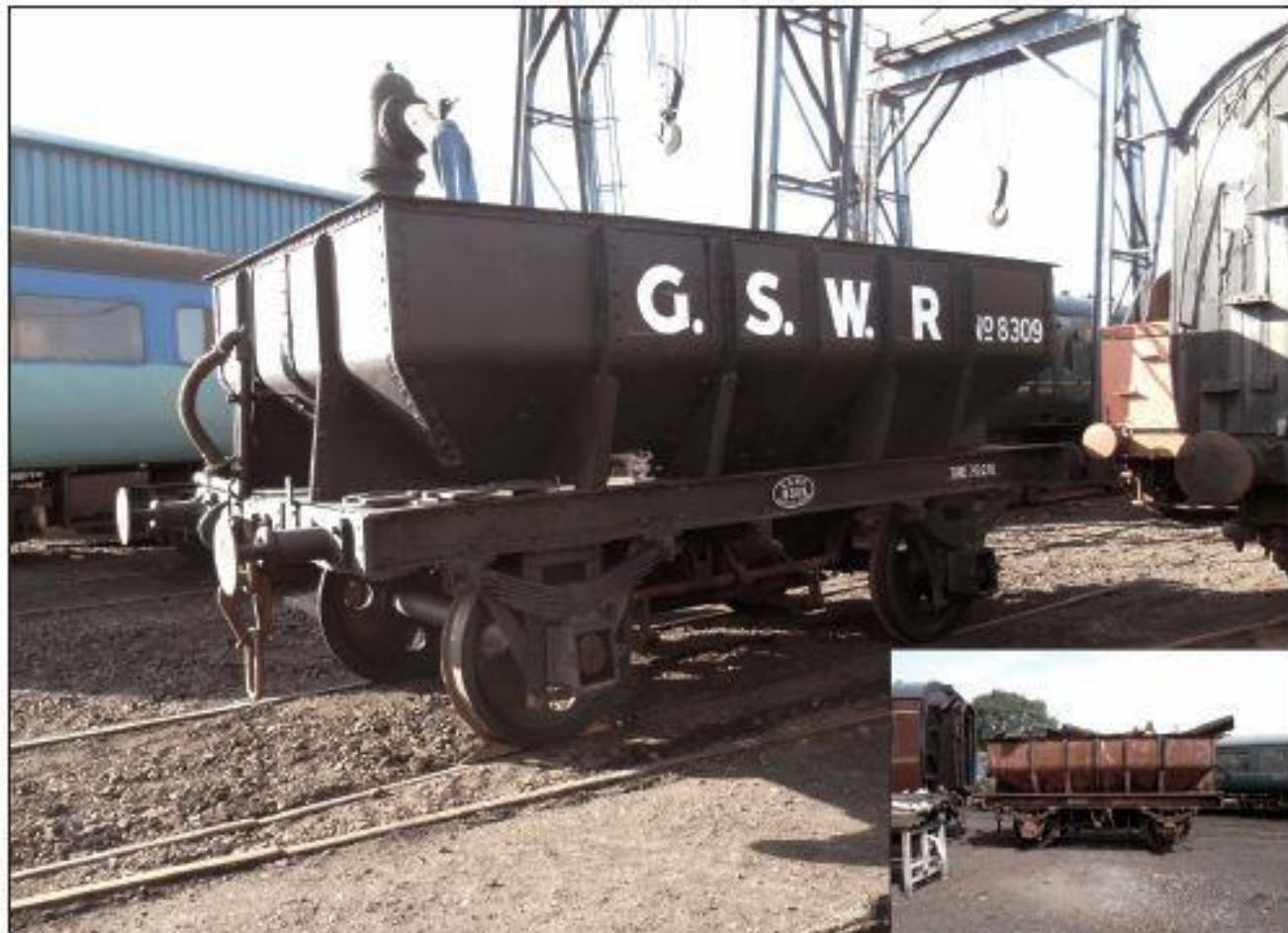
It is hoped that the Gatwicks will move from Dundalk in the first or second quarter of 2019 to Whitehead for storage and remedial work. A Gatwick vehicle has now been selected for overhaul and conversion to make it compatible with our operational fleet. They can be made to comply with certain access aspects contained within RIS-4472-RST.

Finally, I must mention 861. An appeal was launched a few years ago to raise additional funds for the overhaul of this vehicle. I again urge you to consider giving to this project, for instance a donation of say £10 will purchase either a handful of coach screws/ split pins/ paint brushes/ threaded rod/ wood preservative etc to continue the rebuilding process. Even better, an hour

or two of your time would facilitate fitting a new piece of cladding, removing a rotten piece of timber, measuring for new timber, dismantling and cleaning brake gear etc – it all helps and is vital for the survival of the vehicle.

This coach is probably our most historic and interesting piece of rolling stock, and it is vital that we get the vehicle overhauled in as short a timeframe as possible from now on.

To conclude I must thank all the usual suspects; Brian, Paul, Peter, James (F&R), Jonathan, Andrew, Alan, Ian, Joe, David, Sam, Bobby, Mark, Adam, Dermot & Co, Johnny & the E Squad and those others I have torn away from other projects for their help over the last year, without whom the Society simply would not be able to run in the Belfast Area.



Completed GSWR Ballast wagon No.8309 awaits a busy 3BG getting around to putting it in the museum on 25<sup>th</sup> February. Inset is as it looked on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2017. (Photos: Editor).

The 2018 operating season was most successful, with all planned train operations produced. It was most unusual that all the operational certified locomotives Nos.4, 85, 131 and, indeed, 461 had a role to play in the Belfast train programme. All the passenger trains had very healthy loadings. A separate note covering the in-house Whitehead train rides is provided at the end by the Editor.

The winter maintenance period over, the season started with the Easter Eggspress trains on Monday 02<sup>nd</sup> and Tuesday 03<sup>rd</sup> April; two each day. The trains as ever were successful with all children receiving an Easter egg, assisted by the presence of the Easter Bunny. The train engine on both days was newly restored No.131, looking great in its red-lined Great Northern Railway colour scheme.

01<sup>st</sup> April was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of NIR so on Wednesday 04<sup>th</sup> April the Company ran a special steam train journey from Great Victoria Street (GVS) to Whitehead, hauled by No.131. The train worked nominally empty to Belfast Central where a delayed GM locomotive worked the carriages to GVS. Meanwhile No.131 worked light engine to Central Junction and backed onto the train to operate chimney-first. The day was most successful with good media coverage for both the Company and the Society.

For No.131 to be approved for 60 mph running on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> April it, along

with 5 carriages, undertook a late evening brake test run to ensure the AWS and TPWS equipment was fully compliant. The test was successful.

The May International Railtour the Cork and Kerry made its customary start with the positioning run from Whitehead to Dublin on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> May; the Mk2 set being hauled by No.85. On arrival the Mk2s were transferred to Inchicore while No.85 retired to Connolly shed, now used exclusively by the Society.

Friday 11<sup>th</sup> May saw a re-run of the Strand diesel-hauled railtour to Rosslare Strand of a few years previously, it was the Second Strand! The day started wet but as the train progressively travelled south the weather improved to find Wexford in splendid sunshine; being very suitable for photographing GM 071 and the train traversing the quay. Some travelled to the Strand while others detrained at Wexford for sustenance. The day was very enjoyable with an on-time Dublin departure and return.

The highlight of the year was the Cork and Kerry Railtour, with two overnights in Tralee and covering three consecutive days from Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> May. The weekend was blessed with good weather. Meanwhile on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> May No.4 had worked light engine to Mallow and stabled.

On Saturday after a slight delay, No.85 and train worked Dublin Connolly to Mallow without event. With no available turntable at Tralee the locomotive came off the train at Thurles after watering



With NIR 50 headboard, No.131 shunts the Dutch Van 462 onto the Mk2 Train in York Road depot on 04<sup>th</sup> April. A mainline train passes on the left and a C4K enters the fuel road on the right. (Photo: M Crockett)

and operated light engine to Limerick Junction to turn. A GM diesel hauled the train to the Junction where No.85, tender-first, took the train to Mallow for a locomotive swap. No.85 stabled in Mallow while No.4 came on. Several delays on the South Kerry line, outside the Society's control, resulted in a 30-minute delayed arrival to Tralee. Water was taken at Killarney.

The Cork element regrettably had, prior to the tour, been dropped. When it came to the detailed scheduling the proposed train path could not be fulfilled within the permitted driver hours. Sunday had a civilised starting time as we retraced our previous day's journey. No.4 came off at Mallow and worked light engine to Dublin. The plan being it would replace No.85 on our

arrival in Dublin on Monday afternoon. No.85 then worked the return with the customary stop at Killarney. Some great running resulted with a 9-minute early arrival in Tralee.

Monday was a very long mileage operating day from Tralee to Whitehead. There was an on-time departure at 07.45. Due to en-route operating delays, not of the Society's making at Limerick Junction, and being inexplicably looped at Portarlington. Despite the valiant effort of the footplate crew arrival at Dublin Connolly was around 35 minutes down. If all had gone to plan it would have been a straight transfer onto the Mk2 set with No.4 to Belfast and Whitehead. Word unfortunately had come through en route to Dublin that No.4 had been failed on shed with a

cracked fire grate. This really put the pressure on and No.85 would have to substitute for No.4. It required to be serviced in a near record time as the platform occupied by the Mk2 set was required for the evening commuter trains. A valiant effort was made in servicing but on turning the locomotive it became stuck on the turntable; an issue with the balancing rail. That was overcome and eventually No.85 with the set departed for Whitehead at 16.40, one hour 40 minutes late.

As an extra option to the railtour The Renaissance tour was organised and worked on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> May. This featured newly restored No.131. As only one steam crew was available to work both Monday and Tuesday, and due to the delayed arrival at Whitehead, the required 12-hour rest period between operations had to be honoured. This meant a one hour delayed start. The planned itinerary was Whitehead to Antrim via the little used Antrim Branch and return via Bangor. On approaching Antrim and running tender-first there is a 5mph restriction over the Six Mile Water river bridge, immediately followed by a steep incline into Antrim. This had to be strictly obeyed. The locomotive lost its traction on a rusty rail and the train stalled. Some intense sanding of the rails was carried out and Antrim was duly arrived, down on schedule. The crew decided there was a need to take on water, so an unplanned water stop was taken, rather than wait for the scheduled watering at Lisburn. The train now was running around an hour late on the day, two hours down on the schedule. On arrival at Belfast

Central NIR Control (perhaps over-cautious) decided not to permit the train to work to Bangor with its somewhat time-consuming run round procedure. With the evening extra commuter trains not far off and possible knock on effects to service train scheduling, and to the Larne Line later, the Company did not want to encounter that risk. The train returned direct to Whitehead where the museum was open. Despite one or two disappointments the overall extended railtour weekend covering five consecutive days was successful, particularly in view of the (temporary) limited locomotive crew availability for Monday evening and Tuesday.

*[The Editor will again say that all was not bad on the 131 Renaissance operation of 15<sup>th</sup> May and has got further evidence to prove it for, having picked his jaw up from the photo in the Editorial, the very next email contained the picture on the next page and his jaw resumed its downward position, which is unfair because his tea then got cold. Overleaf No.131 rolls through Lambeg showing its red-lined livery to splendid effect on that day. Loco Rep Ryan Downey and NIR Trainee Fireman Davey Haire keep an eye out. Enjoy! (Photo: D Orr)]*

June was a busy month with a Steam Enterprise on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> June with No.85 at its head. The only disappointment was that the planned return of No.4 did not happen. An on shed inspection found a problem with a piston head. It was an unfortunate repeat of a Connolly failure on the Cork and Kerry railtour on another matter. No.85 had to be unexpectedly turned, coaled and prepared for the return north. It was a full train with a good on



train atmosphere. The locomotive work shown was of the highest standard.

The Steam & Jazz season, this year, with an added sixth train, commenced on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> June followed with three consecutive Friday trains. These are very popular and all were full booked. For the record No.85 worked both 15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> June while No.4, having returned light engine on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup>, worked the 29<sup>th</sup> June train. The weather was dry and very warm. By the end of the month trackside vegetation was tinder dry. So regrettably for the 06<sup>th</sup> July train the Society took the responsible decision to request a GM diesel to work that train. Passengers were pre-alerted to the change. The Guinness Jazz Band put in very enthusiastic sessions each evening to much appreciation.

During July work had started on the

new Portrush station and associated improvements. During this major work, still on-going at the time of writing, the station is restricted to a single track with all point work temporarily clipped out of use. The best that was on offer for the Portrush Flyer was steam haulage to Coleraine and a railcar connection to and from Portrush. A decision was taken to operate a limited Flyer season on Sunday's 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> August. The opportunity was taken to put No.131 on both trains and the locomotive performed exceedingly well on its first long operations.

The remaining Steam and Jazz trains were worked on Friday's 24<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> August with No.4 working the first train and No.131 the latter.

Meanwhile No.4 returned light engine to Dublin on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> August to



*Northern train crew waiting for the shunted Portrush Flyer to return to the platform from the Henry Siding at Coleraine on 19<sup>th</sup> August. (L-R) Norman Close, in Russian Railways hat, Nuala Green, Rita Henderson, Eileen Armstrong, Jim O'Neill and Patrick Walker, in Canadian railway hat. (Photo: J Cassells)*



No.4, on the southbound 23<sup>rd</sup> September Steam Enterprise, crosses the Newry Canal south of Poynzpass.  
(Photo: A Gray)

meet charter train commitments there.

September was a relatively quiet month with a single Steam Enterprise operation on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September. No.4 was due to work light engine to Whitehead on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup>. On the same date The Boyne operation was working off Dublin with No.85 the scheduled engine. Unfortunately, No.85 again got stuck on the Connolly turntable and No.4 was commandeered. That left both Nos.4 and 85 in Dublin. To ensure the Enterprise ran, a successful scramble to get a steam crew enabled No.4 to return on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> September; a very tight call. No.85 worked the train home as planned.

The Broomstick Belle trains were worked by No.85 on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> October. These are popular trains but as is the norm

there is not a surge in ticket sales until close to the operating date. Meanwhile No.461 had been at Whitehead throughout and had a valid boiler certificate. The locomotive has had an intermittent steaming problem. A decision was taken to do an electronic test of its cylinders while in operation. Being suitably wired, performance readings were recorded on a computer, being observed from the train. The locomotive worked the final passenger Whitehead to Belfast train and the return empty carriages. Some useful information was obtained. With its boiler certificate having expired on 31<sup>st</sup> December; a decision has to be taken on its operating future.

Passenger ticket demand for the Santa trains vastly exceeds capacity; all being

sold within a few days. Would there be merit in considering a further operating date, possibly mid-week? *[Well, the schools would need to be off – Ed]*

The Santa trains, two each day, operated on Saturdays 01<sup>st</sup>, 08<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, plus Sunday 02<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> December to Whitehead, while Portadown to Lisburn trains ran on Sunday 09<sup>th</sup> December. A special thank you to Santa for his presence; and the St. John Ambulance teams of cadets, accompanied by their leaders, who provided great assistance to Santa. No.85 worked the trains on 01<sup>st</sup> and 02<sup>nd</sup>, while No.131 did 08<sup>th</sup> and 09<sup>th</sup> December. This was believed to be No.131's first visit to Portadown since the early sixties. No.85 again did the honours on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, while No.131 finished the operations on 22<sup>nd</sup> December.

A portion of the first train on 01<sup>st</sup> December was sponsored by The Salvation Army and St Vincent De Paul. This was a success which could be developed upon. The Salvation Army provided musicians at Whitehead.

The final train operation of the year was the Mince Pie which worked to Dublin on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> December, hauled outwards by No.85. No.4 hauled the return, it being required at Whitehead over the winter for the fitting of new wheel tyres. On the return there was a delay after departure that slowed progress due to the preceding Enterprise encountering some temporary running issues. Some time was lost which was difficult to fully recover. All enjoyed the day with mulled wine and mince pies distributed out on

the return journey.

A recurring issue as one will have noted is an intermittent fault with the Connolly shed turntable. This has been recognised and plans are afoot by the Company to rectify the problem.

As ever many thanks to Translink NIR and Irish Rail and, importantly, to all who volunteered and assisted in any way to make the trains happen.

**Train Rides** – In 2018 there were thirteen of these, two in March, eight on the Saturdays of July and August, with one each in September, October and November. Of these, 3BG did her bit for the balance sheet and steam-raiser / fireman training on nine of these, No.131 operated two and Nos.4 and 461 one each. Carriage 68 and brake van 81 worked the first two only, before a failed spring on 81 on 07<sup>th</sup> July meant Mk2 substitution thereafter, the operating calendar not permitting time to dismantle until October. Money is not oft mentioned but direct ticket income ranged from £15 on No.131's unadvertised short-notice launch day on 24<sup>th</sup> March, up to £688 on 08<sup>th</sup> September which is surprising as it was not actually during the summer when one would expect the peak attendance to be.

08<sup>th</sup> September was, however, the European Heritage Open Day (EHOD) and is heavily advertised, has included us for a decade or more; and the general public have come to expect places to be open on this date. Cynics may well point out 'Ah but the museum was free to visit...' but the heavy ticket income that day is come close to only by that on the

date of the Whitehead Food Festival of 04<sup>th</sup> August. The importance of tying in with events rather than going it alone are, as noted last year, manifest.

From the locomotive crew's point of view, the Editor is keenly aware the Roster would rather operate glamorous Portrush Flyers and pit themselves against big engines in the wide world, which is of course what we're here for; but it does have to be said that trainee steam-raisers and firemen benefit hugely from train ride operations. It takes time, patience and the space to

learn to create good mainline loco reps, which the grade of Fireman opens the door to. Following two very busy summer seasons, a sizeable and very welcome boost to the number of RPSI firemen looks imminent. As Whitehead operations increase year on year and once simple days seem to get ever longer and more complicated, the Editor personally thanks the Roster for their continual work and commitment. As the Operations Officer notes, everything was achieved in 2018.



*The ex-Castlerock Up Starter somersault signal has been connected to the signal cabin and indicates 'Off' for No.461 to 'depart' on a Train Ride on 24<sup>th</sup> November.  
(Photo: J Cassells)*

Every year is a challenge for the RPSI's Dublin Operations and 2018 was no exception. The newly re-titled Dublin Operations Management Committee sits down in October/November each year and draws up a draft plan for the following year. We examine our operations and figures for the year and identify what worked and what needs to be changed. The only item that we cannot make provision for is the weather – and in 2018 we got more than our fair share of extreme weather. As a result of the "Beast from the East" in March and then the prolonged heatwave in July we had no choice but to cancel a number of trips and switch from steam to diesel for others. Thanks to good communication, our customers were understanding.

On 24th February we held our Annual Safety Forum for all volunteers. This took place in the offices of the Irish Railway Society of Ireland, Heuston Station, Dublin. On the agenda were updated SMS Documents, Commission for Railway Regulation (CRR) audits and inspections, 2018 Operations, Society activities and Manual Handling/Fire Extinguisher refresher training. We had a good turn-out from our volunteers.

Thus we were all set for our first operation on Sunday March 18th - The Midlander. Heavy snow showers on the previous evening caused some problems with the points on the Irish Rail network. Our Cravens Carriages were trapped on the main line sidings at Inchicore. A PW gang was sent from

Heuston to Inchicore to release the set, but this all took time. As a result of the late departure of this transfer, we had to cancel our first train to Maynooth. With 232 passengers on board, 31 of them from the cancelled trip, the second train departed on time with No.4. Our passengers enjoyed the wonderful scenery along the Royal Canal, snow all the way.

Our second operation was Easter Eggspress on Bank Holiday Monday, April 2nd, from Dublin Connolly to Wicklow. A Status Yellow weather warning had been issued by the Met Office, but the trip proceeded as planned. No.4 departed Connolly for Wicklow with 291 passengers and then operated a local trip back to Greystones with 319 passengers. A second local trip ran to Arklow with 310 passengers and then the train returned to Dublin Connolly.

Next up was a diesel trip - the Branch Line Wanderer on April 7th. With GM locomotive 071 in charge of our train of seven Cravens carriages and a van, we departed Dublin Connolly. We fitted in several photo stops en-route to Waterford, where 074 took over for the run to Limerick. More photo stops were made on the way and at Limerick 086 hooked up for the gentle run along the Nenagh branch to re-join the main line at Ballybrophy and so to Dublin. With further passengers being picked up throughout the tour, our total complement was 304, many of whom were from Britain.



No.4 prepares to depart a snowy Dublin Connolly with 'The Midlander' on 18<sup>th</sup> March. (Photo: M Crockett)

We were back on the DSER for The Dublin Riviera Sunday April 29th operation. No.4 hauled the train of six Cravens and our BR generator van. We departed on time with 280 passengers for Bray and there we picked up a further 305 passengers for a local trip to Wicklow. Back to Bray and on our second local trip to Wicklow we carried 299 passengers before an impressive run by the locomotive crew back to Dublin Connolly.

In May, the Cravens set and our volunteers were used by Belfast Operations for the three-day International Tour from Dublin to Tralee and back. A great team effort!

Dublin Operations' fifth outing of the year took us on the GNR(I) main line to Balbriggan on May 27th for The

Balbriggan Festival. With seven Cravens and a van we departed with No.4 and 145 passengers for the positioning run to Balbriggan, where we took on 263 passengers for the local trip to Drogheda, but unfortunately, we were delayed by the failure of a Down Enterprise at Drogheda.

As we were running more than an hour late and the weather had deteriorated, the RPSI Dublin Operations Manager decided to amend the arrangements when we arrived back at Balbriggan. Instead of running empty to Skerries loop to run round, it was agreed to take all 169 passengers with us, which meant they would be on the train rather than having to wait even longer for us to return to Balbriggan. So they got extra mileage, observed the run-round and did



*Keith Farrelly is thoroughly at home on No.4 on 29th April 'Dublin Riviera'. (Photo: M Devlin)*

not have to spend too much time on the platform at Balbriggan.

Off we went to Skerries, ran round and then back through Balbriggan to Drogheda, where No.4 ran round again and took water. Thanks to the change of plan and some good running we had cut our deficit to just eight minutes by the time we departed Drogheda. Back to Balbriggan to set down and on to Connolly for an on-time arrival. For the day we carried 577 passengers.

Our sixth operation was The Emerald Isle Express, a six-day diesel tour run by Railtours Ireland First Class from June 10th-16th. Although it is diesel-hauled this is a complex operation for Dublin Operations – but a hugely enjoyable experience. A huge amount of work is required before this 'Pullman Dressed' train leaves Inchicore to pick up its VIP

passengers in Dublin Connolly. The carriages have to be cleaned throughout, both inside and outside. White antimacassars are placed on all seats, white tablecloths, lamps and flowers placed on all tables, while all floors are carpeted. Then the tables have to be set and menus worked out, while sufficient food and drink required for six days has to be ordered, with fresh produce being supplied daily. Finally, the staff roster has to be drawn up and accommodation organised for everyone.

So to Day One. After a champagne reception on Platform 5 Dublin Connolly, we departed for Rosslare Strand with GM locomotive 073. Lunch was served by RPSI waiters en-route. After our passengers disembarked, the set continued to Rosslare Harbour for running round and servicing the carriages. While the passengers transferred by coach, we ran from back to Dublin Connolly and then down to Kilkenny for the overnight stop.

The following morning we collected our passengers at Thomastown and brought them to Cork Kent Station via Limerick Junction. Lunch was served during the journey. GM 071 took over the train at Waterford for the trip to Cork, where we stabled overnight. Next morning it was off empty carriages to Cobh with GM 223 in charge. 071 had left earlier and was waiting for us on our arrival. We departed Cobh for Killarney via Mallow.

On the Wednesday we left Killarney for Galway, via Mallow, Limerick, Ennis and Athenry, with lunch being served on the way. After arriving in Galway we

departed empty carriages for Claremorris as there was no siding space in Westport for stabling. We were stabled on the Tuam Platform for the night. Thursday was spent cleaning the set and preparing for the on-board four-course banquet the following evening, Friday June 15th, on the run from Westport to Dublin. Once everything was ready, we departed Claremorris for Westport, where 071 ran round and when the platform became available we took up position. Our passengers loaded and we were off on the final leg of the trip, heading for Dublin with dinner served en-route. Upon arrival at Platform 3 in Dublin Connolly the RPSI Volunteers and Irish Rail staff performed a guard of honour for the passengers as they left the train. We received many expressions of thanks so it was good to know that our efforts were appreciated.

As a result of the fire risk created by the unusually long dry period, Dublin Operations decided to run with a diesel instead of steam for our seventh operation. The Sea Breeze, on Sunday July 8, left Dublin Connolly behind GM 082 for its trip to Wexford, plus local trip to Rosslare Strand. The train ran empty carriages to Rosslare Harbour and we were back on time at Dublin Connolly, having carried 326 passengers altogether. This operation was subjected to a CRR audit.

With the hot weather persisting, and the countryside tinder dry, we decided to cancel our next planned train; The Boyne to Drogheda. But mercifully the weather broke at the end of July, enabling us to proceed as planned with the Enniscorthy "Rockin Food" Festival Express on August 6th. A little bit of history was made because this was the first time we had ventured down the DSER with former GNR(I) Compound No.85 Merlin. With 308 passengers on board we departed 5 minutes late for Enniscorthy and thence to Rosslare with a local excursion, which attracted 329 passengers. As a result of a late departure from Rosslare Harbour we lost our path, but made good time until we were blocked by a signal check outside Greystones, where the down Rosslare was at the platform with a DART in the down siding.

When the train eventually got a green, it emerged that there was a problem with getting No.85 under way again. In the circumstances, a rescue engine was summoned from Connolly. By the time it arrived No.85 had managed to move again and brought the train into the platform. Further delays ensued because a DART had failed at Greystones. When it arrived GM 087 was coupled up, but we were well down on time arriving back at Connolly.



*The Enniscorthy 'Rockin Food' Festival charter of 06<sup>th</sup> August then became a 'Sea Breeze' with No.85 making it to Rosslare Europort for the first time. Here the southbound train enters Rosslare Strand. The closed South Wexford line to Waterford branches off to the left; the loss of this remains a headache to the Society's railtour planning committees, leaving Rosslare at the end of a very long, isolated line; like Sligo. (Photo: F O'Neill)*

No.85 was back on song for the start of September and played a major role in our inaugural steam tour with Just Go Holidays from England. This company was new to us but we combined very well. They took the vacancy created by Steam Dreams which had decided to give Ireland a miss in 2018. We set off in style on Monday September 3rd travelling with a set of six Cravens and a van from Dublin Connolly to Killarney. The locomotive was turned on the triangle at Limerick Junction and ran tender-first through to Killarney. We enjoyed some nice running with Cork driver Ken Fox.

On Wednesday September 5th our train travelled from Killarney via Portarlington to Westport. No.4 took over for the leg from Portarlington to Westport, with

Connolly driver Robbie Jolley at the regulator for the bunk-first run. Happily we arrived in Westport three minutes early.

No.4 was in charge for the final run, back from Westport to Dublin on September 7th, with our passengers being picked up at Castlebar. In total the train had covered 612 miles, the engines had had 11 water stops and we had had one loco change. We carried 90 passengers and catering was from dining car 1522. Everything went well and again our passengers were most complimentary.

Operation No.11 was back on the GNR(I) Mainline, with a rescheduled The Boyne operation on September 16th. No.85 was rostered for this trip but a problem with Connolly turntable had the engine marooned when the electrically-

controlled table refused to move. As luck would have it, No.4 was also in steam that day in preparation for a light engine run to Whitehead, so a quick swap was done and No.4 was immediately re-allocated to the steam specials. We ran from Dublin to Drogheda, Drogheda to Dundalk and then Drogheda to Skerries loop and back, carrying a total of 1,017 passengers during the day.

It was back to diesel haulage for the South Western Railtour on October 13th. GM 088 was in charge and we carried 331 passengers. Single line working on the Cork main line delayed us and by the time we got to Cork it was obvious that we could not cover the Cobh Branch as planned and keep our paths on the Western Rail Corridor. Hence it was back to the main line and off to Limerick, where 081 took over for the journey back to Dublin via Ennis, Athenry, Athlone and Portarlington. A great tour, apart from missing out on Cobh, but in 2019 we plan to do another tour, Dublin to Cobh, Midleton and Killarney.

We marked Hallowe'en by decorating our train accordingly and then organising a trip to Drogheda on October 29th. Plan A had been to go to Maynooth but engineering work was in progress at Glasnevin Junction so it was back to the Great Northern. As the set had been turned during the South Western Tour, it was necessary to have the van shunted to the other end of the train, and this was done in Inchicore the previous week. We departed Connolly for Drogheda with 344 passengers on board and No.4 at the head of the train

and all went well. On the second trip, however, with 343 passengers on board, the train pulled up at Rush and Lusk, because the crew were not happy with the engine. It was decided that we would go to Skerries Loop. The concerns persisted and for fear of blocking the main line, it was decided to seek the assistance of a GM Loco from Drogheda for the return journey to Dublin. 081 arrived from Drogheda and double headed the train back to Connolly. A subsequent examination of the locomotive later found no issues.

We finished the year in fine style with our traditional and very popular Santa trains, which ran over the first three weekends in December. All eight carriages were decorated immediately after the Hallowe'en Trains, selection boxes were ordered and a roster drawn up for carriage stewards and maintenance crews. Musicians were sourced, catering staff arranged, food ordered and for this a huge number of teddy bears were purchased for John Richardson's "Everyone's a Winner" raffle.

As usual, Santa began his operation as soon as the train left Connolly, preceded as he is by the musicians. Each child receives a selection box while the adults are offered a free mulled wine, tea or coffee and a mince pie. In Maynooth, Santa leaves the train and RPSI Volunteer Martin Devlin arranges photographs to be taken with Santa. "Santy" is a well-oiled operation and ran well again in 2018. On our first train we were subjected to an audit by CRR. We ran five trains over the first weekend, carrying 2,092 passengers to Maynooth.

Then six on the second weekend, carrying 2,466 passengers. For the final weekend, we carried 2,304 passengers on six trains.

The only issue we had was on Saturday December 15th on our second train, when there appeared to be a problem with No.4's performance. A stop was arranged at Navan Road Parkway to examine the engine. As a result of the delay and losing our path, the Irish Rail Regulator diverted us to M3 Parkway Branch. There is a half-hourly service on the Maynooth line and there were also specials on this day for a rugby match taking place at the Aviva Stadium, Lansdowne Road. As there is no signalling at M3 Parkway it was decided that a loco would come out from Connolly and haul the train back. So this was our second "first" of the year, in that it was the first time No. 4 had visited the M3 Parkway Branch. For the Santa Season as a whole, we carried 7,062

passengers on 17 trains.

And so ended another year. A total of 13,090 passengers were carried, which was an increase of 959 on 2017. We managed to fit in an extra 168 passengers on our Santa Trains compared with the previous year.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to former treasurer John Richardson for his tireless efforts in promoting the on-train raffle, the proceeds of which all go towards the restoration of GM Loco 134. Over the year as a whole he raised more than €25,000, which is a new record. Another useful source of income for this fund is the sale of RPSI calendars by brothers John and Gerard Owens – which brought in a further €10,000. Thanks to all the sales team.

May I close by thanking all concerned for making 2018 such a successful year. We look forward to doing it all again in 2019.



*Brian Gillen, Denis McCabe and Stephen Comiskey enjoying the 'Second Strand' diesel railtour of 11<sup>th</sup> May.  
(Photo: C Friel)*

Work continues in Inchicore yard on maintenance and upgrading of our Cravens set and we are grateful to Irish Rail for this facility. Carriage 1539 has been moved back into the former carriage shop as restoration work continues. The most significant project of the year was the fitting of transponders to all the stock, which will allow each vehicle to interact with the wheel and bearing monitoring stations at Killester, Inchicore and Monard, near Limerick.

These stations use audio technology to monitor bearings and give warning of impending trouble much earlier than heat-based sensors. Our thanks are due to Donnchadh Connolly of Irish Rail's CME department who arranged for the system to be enabled on our vehicles. There is a similar mentoring station at Adelaide and transponders have been provided for the Whitehead set and the two roller-bearing GNR tenders.

Our heritage set moved from Heuston valeting plant where it has been since December 2016 to join the rest of the gang at Inchicore yard on November 13<sup>th</sup>.

The full running set of nine coaches was available for our Santa Trains. 1508 is a maintenance spare. The full set ran to Drogheda and back on February 24<sup>th</sup> for braking trials in order to establish a braking curve for the Cravens at 70mph. A shorter seven-piece set ran to Dundalk and back on February 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> for

crew training.



*1539 in fleet casualty, Inchicore, following work to steam heating and awaiting refurbished bogies from Whitehead (Photo; S Comiskey)*

The Dublin Cravens set consists of the following standard 64-seat coaches (mileage run during 2018 in brackets).

1505 (5,192), 1506 (4,354), 1523 (2,434), 1532 (5,413), 1539 (under overhaul – nil), 1541 (4,354). Cravens 3185 is awaiting overhaul.

1508, our 47-seat snack car/shop 1508 covered 2,495 miles. Bar car 1514 (28 seats) and dining car 1522 (24 seats), both covered 5,413 miles as did heating van/generator vehicle 3173.

We took down the Xmas decorations in the train on our first day in the New Year and brought a stone mill out of the car park for the foundry. The following week we removed a leaking ram from the Telehandler, which I took away for overhaul, and we started the ramp outside 5-road. Rather than build a complete turn-out for what would be a rarely used piece of track, I decided we could make the necessary locomotive movements with a temporary alignment, similar to what was used for the move of the sleeping coach last year.

Despite a heavy snowfall the ramp and track was finished on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> with essential help from our old MK1 JCB, the Telehandler being out of action. Two days later a small group including Gordon Hunt pulled RH Smyth and the Carlow diesel out of 5-road with the Atlas and after moving the ramp to the Belfast end of the track, off loaded both locos and moved them to 3-road. The following Sunday a very big shunt with 3BG brought out Nos.184 and 27 which were propelled up the ramp using coach 411 as a buffer, after the Carlow and RH Smyth had been moved to the Larne end of carriage shed A-road. On the following Tuesday we moved the ramp to the Larne end of the temporary track and propelled Nos.184 and 27 into 5-road and on Thursday we dismantled the track and tidied up. On this occasion we were greatly helped by the Telehandler which by now had the repaired ram successfully installed.

Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> January was exactly 50 years since our MK1 3C JCB was first registered and to mark the event we had a small birthday party, complete with bunting and a cake, which was enjoyed by many volunteers and all the paid HEI staff. We also spent part of the day removing all the long crossing timbers from the R6 flat wagon which was parked on the turn-table, as this piece of rolling stock had been earmarked for scrappage.

In preparation for St Patrick's Day we did a full track inspection which included the oiling and greasing of all the operational points. On the Thursday before the big day we helped put some large, new tubes into No.85 and a scrap drive, primarily of old aluminium ladders, yielded £120.

On the 20th we fixed the crossing opposite the signal box which had developed a degree of vertical movement, only really detectable during the recent train rides. A large consignment of new large tubes was off loaded from a lorry, using the Telehandler and carefully placed in the workshop. The last Thursday in March was spent re-fitting the cow catchers to the Carlow diesel shunter, these having been removed in January to make its exit from 5-road a possibility. In addition a quantity of quarry blinding was used to top up the inter-rail paths on the museum route. On a lovely sunny 5<sup>th</sup> April three of us were passed out as Telehandler drivers, as requested by the recent Health and Safety inspection.



*James Friel and Dermot Mackie watch on 21<sup>st</sup> January as No. 184 is cautiously pushed up onto the ramp, which is acting as a temporary bridge to take Nos. 184 and 27 over the gap between the Turntable Road and the disconnected 5-Road. When both locos are on the bridge, the sloping section will be dismantled and rebuilt at the opposite end of the bridge so the engines can be moved off into the loco shed for display. (Photo: Editor)*

Additionally we fitted two new large tyres to the machine, as also requested by the Inspectorate. The following week we moved the HEI office back down stairs to front of house, as this gave more room and allows a watch to be kept on deliveries. Two new areas of ground on the bank were planted with wild flowers which had been a great success last year. The track extension at the outside Larne end of the Dunleath Workshop was cleared of many items in preparation for an imminent lorry arrival of bogies from Dublin for refurbishment.

In the middle of April we had our ferrous skip emptied and netted a tidy £522. We

also packed a weak rail joint at the water column and carried out a complete check of all track, oiling blades and switches and replacing fallen keys. Loco No.85 was pulled out of 1-road for steam testing, following her re-tubing, and the opportunity was taken to replace a rotten long timber in the shed road. On 28<sup>th</sup> April Phillip Newell and I were passed out as competent Atlas drivers by an outside trainer.

On the first day in May I sprayed all the tracks with a systemic weed killer, while later in the week with help from John Williams we moved the spare Guinness van bogies from the Larne Siding to B-

road and shunted items up the siding to fill the space. A small scrap gather of copper and aluminium brought in £50 and the Atlas was given its annual major service. Later in the month we replaced the roof glass in the Telehandler, carried out a track survey and repaired a couple of worn rail joints with new fishplates and bolts. The following week was busy with clearing all the rubbish from the tour train, a further weed spraying of the back and side yards and some necessary gardening duties on the embankment opposite the stables.

At the end of May we loaded rotten timbers from the Guinness van and the contents of the ash bunker into a skip. The curved approach to the turntable had spread out of gauge and on a very hot day we replaced two sleepers with help from Nigel Spiers and Nevis Vaz.

Early June saw us repairing the bottom of the Atlas' door, whilst an extensive track survey revealed the need for packing of a major rail joint before the divide between carriage A and B-roads. On Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> June three more members passed the Telehandler driving course. This will greatly help in such duties as coaling the locomotives. It became a routine on Thursday for the next few weeks to pull out the engine for the Friday night Steam & Jazz and, on each occasion, we did an inspection of the track. It became apparent that many of the rail joints needed to be upgraded and over the last two weeks of June and the first week in July we put in place 120 new bolts. This hard work, involving drilling holes in the rail in very warm weather, was mostly done very capably by Colin Stewart and Willie

Hollinger with the last working Thursday in June coinciding with the hottest day of the year. The main priority was to strengthen the platform and middle road joints which were to carry public trains.

In early July we painted the wicket fence at the Station building and David Lowry recycled two pallets of old lead batteries which netted £600. July also saw the return of Whitehead in Bloom to our platform; they planted up our tubs with a delightful selection of flowers.



'Grips' built this scaffold on the Atlas' attendant P-Way bogie on 22<sup>nd</sup> July so that they could use it as a mobile filming platform. Grips, The Editor learnt, are not the Site Squad but backstage support technicians for film companies. (Photo: Editor)

Following a short break for the holidays on 23<sup>rd</sup> July we had a day of filming at Whitehead which featured Liam Neeson. All went off without a hitch; both the Director and Producer were delighted. In the last week of the month a further scrap battery drive brought in £520.

Most of August was spent upgrading the track on all our public running roads.

On Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> August some repairs were carried out to the decking of the Coleraine turn table during the layover

for the first Portrush Flyer. Unfortunately this could not be completed on the following Sunday, but the final replacement of some 10 timbers was done on the first Tuesday in September with good help from Denis Campbell and Matthew Crockett. I purchased the large long timbers locally and was given excellent help by Chris Dunlop, the local NIR PW manager.

A small derailment of one axle of No.131's tender on the evening of Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> August broke six cast iron chairs. Dismantling and replacement took place with the mid-week Site gang on two days to ensure the track was ready for the following weekend's activities. In the last week in August I used the Atlas to lift the frames off the Guinness van from the heavy lift road into 2 shed road and then the Telehandler was able to lift the bogies to the same location.

September saw the Site gang, including Robin Morton and Peter Lindsay, doing repairs to our running track which primarily involved a series of levelling exercises using jacks and manual ballast packing. A broken exhaust pipe in the 463 generator was found and repaired. In 2016 the Society acquired a number of pieces of NCC signalling equipment from Castlerock, which included a complete starter signal on its original pole. A site for this unique item was found at the Belfast end of our platform and a large deep hole was dug out over a couple of weeks, including a diagonal shaft to track level for the necessary

cabling. Despite storm Ali, shuttering was made and concrete poured into the surrounding hole by Roy Thompson and myself to make a fitting slot for the signal pole.

The first week in October saw both the Atlas road rail excavator and the JCB Telehandler getting their respective insurance and safety checks by an outside assessor. I am pleased to report that both pieces of plant passed with only the Atlas needing a change of tyre. During the Tuesday of the second week we carefully brought the Castlerock signal down from the car park with the Telehandler and on the Thursday a large squad, including Trevor Taylor, erected it with the Atlas.

We also replaced the cable on the winch at the drawbridge in the Wheeldrop Shed. In the middle of the month I gave the Site its last application of weed killer and we concreted in the steps for the signal. On the 18<sup>th</sup> we did a monster shunt to retrieve a flat wagon of Donegal items from the Larne Siding. Flat wagon R6 was cut up and sent for scrap and we helped the dealer move the bogies to the temporary siding we had made beside the carriage shed at the back of the site. New translucent roof sheets were fitted to the loco sheds at this time and they give a tremendously bright improvement to what were dark and dingy buildings.

Before the start of the hectic Santa season I emptied the ash bunker into a large skip for disposal and with great



*During 2018 No.4 broke new ground for herself by making it to M3 Parkway. Likewise No.85 went to Rosslare Europort for the first time and presumably No.131's visit to York Road was also a first. Not to be outdone, 3BG took herself ten feet further to her right than she had ever been before. Here she is shunting wagons for Sam Hall in the Larne Siding on 08<sup>th</sup> April, a task for which her short wheelbase makes her ideal. (Photo: Editor)*

help from David Orr [Not the one in the No.131 photo later, which is the original David Orr – Ed] we connected the signal box lever frame to the recently installed Castlerock starter. Pulling this lever has become a favourite item with museum visitors. In the middle of November the JCB Telehandler got its annual big service and we cleared the stable gutters of leaves. The following week Tom Mathers and some of us, together with the Atlas, dug out the extensive foundations needed for the ground lever frame at the bridge. Forty-four Christmas present boxes arrived and were carefully stored in the container on

the platform and we put up the big tree. During the last week in November and the first in December we connected the bridge point to the frame using a critical set of cranks and levers which Mark Walsh had saved from Claremorris. The whole system is fully interlocked and has proved an excellent, safe arrangement for the movement of trains over the busy Santa period. We ended the year with our annual monster lunch time fry in the Edwardian tea room, complete with crackers, silly hats and mince pies.

All in all a very enjoyable and satisfying year with a great bunch of workers.

2018 got off to a dream start when Whitehead Railway Museum (WRM) was named as joint winner of the prestigious Manisty Award at the annual Heritage Railway Association Awards in Birmingham in February. This was a real feather in our cap and the plaque with which we were presented is now on prominent display.

Special events create an opportunity to showcase WRM to our guests and the media and so we were pleased to be able to host the launch on March 24<sup>th</sup> of newly restored Q Class No.131. Catering was provided by the team from the newly christened Edwardian Tea Room on site, and despite the unavoidable absence of HRA President Lord Faulkner of Worcester, the event went well.

Our wheelchair-friendly route takes visitors on a journey past more than 100 panels - each with a myriad of captioned pictures, factual information, labelled diagrams and video clips. The iPads contain many extra pictures plus 3D scans of locomotives, carriages and wagons. The video and interactive screens are popular, if high-maintenance. Younger visitors enjoy the kiddies' train and everyone likes the replica dressing-up clothes.

Sometimes getting around WRM in the requisite 75 minutes can be a bit of a challenge for guides; it usually depends on how many questions there are. Our guides are seldom stumped and indeed amaze themselves by how much information they have at their finger-

tips. The Guide for Guides booklet compiled by Charles Friel of the Curatorial Team provides everyone with a vast array of information.

Thanks are due to our team of 30 guides and to Eileen Armstrong who co-ordinated the rota during the year. Visitors value the fact that our guides are themselves RPSI members who can provide a personal insight. In tandem with guided tours we are also offering a self-guided option which enables visitors to spend more time in a gallery of specific interest.

A major asset of WRM is the Edwardian Tea Room, under catering manager Sam Millar. Chef Martin Black's innovative menu and tasty lunches get rave reviews and are developing the Tea Room into an attraction in its own right.

Our busiest days are always the days when we can offer steam train rides. The opportunity of a trip on a steam train – even just for a few hundred yards up and down the track – brings WRM to life. We have been operating Steam Saturdays on the last weekend of each month and most Saturdays during the summer - and these always bring new visitors to the museum as well as exciting interest in our mainline excursions.

The Museum showed its flexibility by acting as a film set in July for the shooting of a new movie called *Normal People* (no comment!) involving home-grown star Liam Neeson. We look forward to viewing the film. Then in



*The RPSI crew who assisted with the filming of "Normal People" on 23<sup>rd</sup> July pose with Liam Neeson, whom it should be specified is the taller one in the baseball hat. His supporting cast are (L-R) Dermot Mackie, Sam Hall, Ryan Downey, James Robinson and Alistair Campbell. (Photo: R Downey)*

September we played host to Northern Woman magazine which used the WRM as a backdrop for a fashion shoot. The impressive results were featured in the November issue of the magazine.

Now that it has a lockable internal door fitted, the Education Room in the Stables is proving a useful piece of lettable space. The Northern Ireland Museums Council staged a training day for representatives of various museums in the autumn, while the RPSI used it for a Volunteers' Day in September.

Our WRM pamphlet was redesigned with a bright new image and some 30,000 copies were printed. These were distributed to Tourist Information Centres, other visitor attractions, railway stations, airports and hotels, and helped to bring many visitors to the museum.

We linked in with Translink NI Railways for this promotion and for the display of

our three new pop-ups which toured stations on the network from the summer until late autumn. In conjunction with Translink we offered a 20% discount to visitors in possession of a valid train ticket. This was a win-win – it highlighted the option of travelling by train to Whitehead as well as developing a new market for the museum.

In similar vein, discount deals were on offer to visitors to the nearby Gobbins Cliff Path and Carrickfergus Castle. Thanks to our involvement in Mid & East Antrim Council's Gobbins Cluster Group, we have been working closely with other visitor attractions on this part of the Causeway Coast Route.

WRM featured on Groupon and we linked in with Club Marketing Services, offering reduced admission to a host of public sector retirement associations. Our members were not forgotten – produce your membership and have

one free tour of WRM per year.

It has become clear that while individual visitors are important, the key to driving up our numbers is to attract groups. During the year we had numerous group visits, benefitting from a deal that included morning coffee, a guided tour and then a light lunch in the Edwardian Tea Room. They came from churches, walking clubs, retirement clubs, schools, other railway societies and tour companies.

Good work by Tony Ragg and the curatorial committee enabled WRM to renew its status in September as an accredited museum with NI Museums

Council. This is important both because it is the kitemark of the museum sector and demonstrates our commitment to managing collections effectively for the enjoyment and benefit of users. Crucially, accreditation is something that will be on every funder's checklist.

In October WRM played host to a visit by the International Railway Safety Council whose delegates were on a break-out day from a conference in Dublin. The 30 delegates arrived in style on board a Translink NI Railways CAF set which arrived directly at the Excursion Station platform. Hopefully this is a harbinger of things to come. Those visitors included



*Receiving a certificate from Allison Cosgrove of the Department for Communities on 18<sup>th</sup> September to mark the successful completion of the NI Museums Council accreditation process for Whitehead Railway Museum are RPSI chairman John McKegney and Tony Ragg and Charles Friel of the Curatorial Committee. (Photo: R Morton)*

several from both North and South Korea. The delegate from North Korea found that our replica NCC signal box was just like those at home - he excitedly told his colleagues that the block instruments, the levers and even the bell codes were the same!

In November Rebecca Laverty was appointed as our full-time Museum Administrator and we are delighted to see her getting to grips with her new role. She brings with her experience of the visitor attraction sector and we wish her well at Whitehead.

Whitehead Railway Museum has come on leaps and bounds during the year and members are entitled to be proud of what has been achieved.

While the RPSI's Belfast Management Committee and the Events Committee have made an important contribution, much of WRM's growth during the year

is down to the commitment, dedication and leadership of our Acting General Manager, Siobhan Dillon.

She rapidly became the "go-to person" at WRM and her two and a half-day week became more of a full-time job. We owe her so much for raising the profile of WRM, liaising with funders and public bodies, and developing new products such as our popular Murder Mystery and Afternoon Tea promotions. Siobhan intimated in the summer that she wished to bow out at the end of 2018 and now a recruitment process has started for the vacant post of General Manager.

We wish Siobhan well in the future and will remember with gratitude the contribution she has made to RPSI and WRM. She has laid the foundations and now it is up to the RPSI to develop WRM to its full potential.



Peter Scott, John McKegney and just possibly No.186 take delight from Conrad Natzio's "Irish Steam in the 1960s, end of an era" on 24<sup>th</sup> March; 131's launch day. If you wish to smile like them, your copy is available to buy from your friendly RPSI Bookshop, as per inside front cover; royalties to the RPSI! (Photo: C Friel)

During the year Edward Friel stepped down as Curator and Board member. Thanks are due to Edward for his important contribution during his tenure. We hope he will return to the post in future. In the meantime, Museum Mentor to the Society Mark Kennedy is standing in as Curator whilst Edward concentrates on making new videos to interpret aspects of the collection. Also during the year, we welcomed Peter Rigney onto the Curatorial Team.

We wish to thank the many people who offered objects to the museum during the year. Whilst we are not always able to accept everything, each offer is still appreciated. In 2019 the Curatorial Team plans to investigate ways to increase the amount of secure space in which to store smaller specimens in the future. Please have a word with one of the Curatorial Team if you are thinking of bequeathing objects or archive material to the society to allow the museum to make plans in keeping with your wishes.

During the year the Curatorial Team visited the remains of a BNCR saloon carriage used for royal visits which survives in a Co Armagh field. Thanks to Kenneth Beattie for drawing it to our attention. In December team members visited Mullingar shed with Nicky Cox to view GSWR open third-class carriage 837 and CIE 12Ton box van 26405. This van was used as a mobile store during filming of the First Great Train Robbery film in 1978. These will shortly have to

vacate their resting place for the past 40 years as the Mullingar site is due to be redeveloped for social housing. The carriage is a third-class open without fixed seating which may make it potentially useful. The wagon which is fitted with large sliding doors would provide great storage and may be a potential future Youth Team project.

The Curatorial Team is currently developing a souvenir guide book for Whitehead Railway Museum. Please contact them if you have suggestions for content. Publication is planned for Easter 2019.



*For the International Railway Safety Council visit to WRM of 25<sup>th</sup> October, CAF 3004 became the first C3K to visit Whitehead and the second CAF overall, following the visit of C4K 4007 on 14<sup>th</sup> October to gauge for this trip.*

*There is a vague resemblance to Castlerock prior to October 2016, the Up Starter signal from there having been transferred to Whitehead following closure of that passing loop in that month.*

*(Photo: C Friel)*

My early experience of the RPSI trains was the rare glimpse and sound of a steam train passing by on the Belfast-Dublin mainline, through the mid-Louth countryside in a flash of noise, a trail of smoke and a blur of differently coloured carriages.

A trip to the former GNR railway station at Dunleer, Co. Louth, which was by then reduced to an intermediate block post between Dundalk and Drogheda, formed part of regular Sunday activities in fair weather. Dunleer had also become the centre of track renewal work, the goods yard was used to provide track ballast. This provided hours of railway activity to watch the shunting and, a couple of times, trips on the ballast-plough brake van during

such shunts before the ballast train moved off. On rare occasions Paddy Boyle, former GNR then CIE Signalman, would be on duty on weekends presenting an opportunity to visit Dunleer signal box.

It was on one such occasion, about the age of ten. I had my first encounter with a mainline steam locomotive. The Steam Enterprise halted before Dunleer signal box on the 'UP' platform (possibly a result of single line working). They were different times and I had an opportunity have a close look at WT Class 2-6-4T No.4; thereafter railways and steam locomotives became my primary interest.

As life moved on, so did the aspects of family; home and career so other



*Jonathan Clinton stands in front of 3BG, having successfully passed his steam raising practical assessment on 27<sup>th</sup> January. (Photo: J Clinton)*

interests developed but railways and steam always remained with me. To mark my fortieth year, I decided to revisit my interest in steam locomotives and treated myself to a footplate experience on the Severn Valley Railway. This was the catalyst to become a member of the RPSI. I joined the RPSI with the intention of becoming an active volunteer as soon as possible.

Not knowing what aspect of volunteering I would be useful or indeed capable of, I took the opportunity of applying as a Volunteer Tour Guide at the Whitehead Railway Museum. During one Train Rides event, I put my name forward for the locomotive operations roster, having observed this more hands-on aspect of railway heritage volunteering. Initially I assisted Nelson Poots with steam raising and cleaning 3BG in preparation for a Friday evening shunt in the yard. I quickly discovered this is the only way to get to know the parts of a steam locomotive and how they fit together, along with the fundamentals of steam locomotive operation. During the evening yard shunt, the Shunter, Mark Walsh, introduced me in shunting hand & lamp signals, the operation of points, couplers, vacuum & steam connections and the yard layout, which has letter and number designations for each track; tracks being known as "roads".

For the next while, I continued to assist different Steam Raisers with different locomotives, at times starting in the early morning hours. Having completed a written theory questionnaire on steam-raising, followed by the practical assessment with Peter Scott, I qualified

as a Steam Raiser. At the same time, I continued learning as assistant to the Shunters until I could independently demonstrate the required knowledge and skills to complete the theory and practical Shunter assessments. With Dermot Mackie assessing, I qualified as Shunter.

Next on the horizon was Trainee Fireman. Accompanied and coached by qualified and experienced volunteer Firemen, you learn the details of how to prepare, fire, operate and finally dispose of the RPSI's fleet of steam locomotives. This is a huge learning curve as you are now interacting and controlling aspects of the locomotive. A great deal of commitment, learning and practical knowledge is required; but the rewards are equally as great, as I found when I took my first short trip on the footplate of No. 4 on a Steam Enterprise between Lanyon Place and Lisburn.

In between steam raising and shunting in the yard, I discovered the very rewarding aspect of rolling stock restoration. The practical tasks of cleaning, grinding metal, taking apart, painting and reassembling future museum exhibits with other volunteers gives a very satisfying sense of teamwork. With a shared interest, the ability of an individual to achieve large-scale results over time is amazing.

I spent my childhood years during the summer school holidays travelling from Connolly to Bray behind a steam locomotive. There were no foreign holidays in those days and I was lucky to have five or six summer outings to Bray with my mother and siblings.

Nearly all trains were steam-hauled then. When the diesels came into service things were not the same. I remember quite clearly being brought into Connolly (Amiens Street in those days) by my mother. We were disappointed to find a diesel locomotive on our train, so much so that my brother and I refused to board. My mother inquired from CIE staff as to when the next steam-hauled train was going to Bray. We waited over an hour for this train. Little did I know it would be the last time I travelled steam-hauled by Irish Rail.

The change from steam to diesel was very fast; all the steam engines were withdrawn from CIE in the early sixties. Only for the foresight of the founder members of the RPSI did they manage to save some. I marvel at the men who built these machines, a great piece of engineering without the aid of computers. Every time we run a trip, we are recreating an experience of rail travel which was enjoyed by previous generations. It's great to have passengers on board who have never seen a steam engine and we often have children on board who have never even seen coal. The joy of sitting in heritage coaches hauled by a steam engine is

breath-taking with the sound of the locomotive puffing away and the smell of smoke filtering through the windows. It is satisfying being part of this experience and I hope it continues for a long time to come.

I started an apprenticeship in 1963 to the trade of electrician and then spent 50 years working in that business. When my first 2 children were around 7 or 8, I discovered the RPSI were operating day excursions using heritage coaches and all hauled by steam locomotives! My children still reminisce about these trips and I now bring my grandchildren on the Santa trains. It's marvellous to see the tradition carrying on.

I retired from work some six years ago and found that there was a void in my life. To try to occupy myself with an interest, I applied to the RPSI to see if they could fit me in. I have been a member for the last five years and still going strong. My work as a volunteer involves maintenance on our heritage Cravens carriages and some work on carriage presentation, which we attend to on Thursdays. On our steam and diesel trips I work as a steward. Upon joining the RPSI, each volunteer starts as a steward and some then choose to branch out into our other departments.

It's a marvellous experience to arrive in Connolly at the start of a day and look over at our loco shed to see our steam locomotive starting to move towards our carriages, which have been hauled earlier from Inchicore by diesel. Our loco

is fully loaded with coal and water and the steam raisers have about five hours work already completed while the rest of us volunteers are still under the blankets. Then the carriage crew attend to the generator, steam heat, PA etc and check everything works OK. Each volunteer plays his or her part to make our journey an unforgettable experience for our passengers, many of whom I get a chance to meet. I can honestly say ninety-nine percent thoroughly enjoy their day out with us, with many being repeat passengers.

Two or three times per year our train is charted by a private company which usually involves passengers from overseas travelling with us for a six-day journey. For these we lay carpets, dress

our tables in white tablecloths complete with silver service and table lamps. At night-time our carriages take on a new dimension especially with the glow of the table lights. You know you are doing a good job when IE staff visit our coaches and marvel at the way they are presented.

Our Craven coaches need constant maintenance as they are over fifty years old. Before I joined, volunteers had converted one standard sixty-four-seater coaches into a bar car and another into a diner complete with all the equipment necessary for the preparation of food. That is what keeps me active in the RPSI; maintenance and stewarding on our trips. Long may it continue!



*Richie Moran (Right) smartly turned out on Carriage Steward duty with Derek Murray. (Photo: S Comiskey)*

My title is a quotation from Bob Clements' paper on the Q class in *IRRS Journal 45*, he said: *"The Q was above all a willing engine, responding at once to hard work with plenty of steam, (though without killing the fireman to do it), and able to take the full opening of the regulator without excessive noise or any feeling of strain. Locomotive design is largely a matter of hitting the right compromise between opposing factors, and to do the work they did without excessive consumption of coal on their fairly small grate shows that the Qs class must have come very near the ideal in most of their proportions."*

What follows is very much a layman's view, and I am greatly indebted to both NIR crews and the RPSI loco reps for the insights they have shared with me.

**PROLOGUE: EASTER MONDAY & TUESDAY:** Ryan Downey and James Friel prepared 131 for her first public outing on the "Easter Bunny" of 2 April. Gary Moore, Anto Dargan and Inspector Charlie Lewisley were the NIR crew. The load was 6 Mk2. Pending final signing-off of all the electrical gear 131 had a special derogation to operate on the main line, but only at 40m/h maximum. So what were the initial reactions? Here is an 'insider' summary:

*The preparation crews appreciated the thinner frames and high pitch of the boiler which allow easy access to the motion for oiling - except for the big ends and eccentrics which require lying across all*

*the motion. The eccentrics have bang caps, requiring two hands and a spanner to remove to fill. The plan is to bore them out for corks, for ease of filling. 131's steaming was good, with all bearings cool after every run and just one issue for the repair book - to adjust the brake rigging on the driver's side. She seems to steam well on six firings in each round - three across the front, then three ahead of the middle, then a pause and three across the back and three towards the middle again. She currently blows off slightly below the 175lbs she's pressed to, and over the Easter weekend kept a steady 155/160lbs against both injectors. Very little to clear from the ashpan or smokebox - albeit at the end of three quite short days.*

Each day began with an empty run to Belfast, with an 11.37 loaded departure for Whitehead. The start out of Central up that very sharp rise saw us pass Lagan Junction in 2'20" doing 10, then a steady acceleration to 27 at Donegall Quay. We slightly exceeded our schedule, taking 42'13" to Whitehead Excursion, booked 40. The 13.03 return produced a bit of a bark from the engine as Gary accelerated through Carrick before the first unchecked climb of Mount bank, falling on the 1/98 to 27 at Mount and 25 min before Trooperslane. Here we cut the schedule, taking 36'30" to Central.

The 14.37 special had signals at Lagan Junction, but although reduced to walking pace 131 was never in danger

of sticking on the tricky climb to The Bridges. One of the support crew wondered whether the lower pressure gave less danger of a power surge on the wet rail that can cause 85 to slip. Up the 1/97 to Greenisland we fell from 31 at post 5 to 28 before signals to 16. Again, some time was lost to the checks, and we took 45'32" for the run, booked 40.

By the 16.03 special to Belfast they had the engine warmed up nicely, holding a very good 29 min at Trooperslane. Time to Belfast was 36'27" – up on schedule. On the nominally empty run back to Whitehead we did 40 out the Lough Shore, and climbed confidently up to Greenisland, accelerating from signals to 21 at Whiteabbey to 26 through Greenisland. 39'11" to Whitehead, booked 40. Overall, a very positive start!

Easter Tuesday had the same NIR crew and schedule. The 10.05 to Belfast was a bit livelier and Gary gave us a good blast up Mount bank, even accelerating on the easing through Trooperslane and the final 1/120 up to Greenisland station: we stopped at Central in 35'48".

Coming out of Central we took nearly 3½ minutes to Lagan Junction, coming down to single figures. We had another good run up to Greenisland, not falling below 30 on the 1/97 and 37 down to Trooperslane. The time to the Excursion Platform was 41'20". Another bright run back to Belfast on the 13.03, took 35'42". The Mount bank was again tackled in some style with 30 before Trooperslane.

The afternoon start out of Central began slowly: we passed Lagan Junction in 2'08" in single figures, but we did a

sprightly run through Yorkgate. Signals to 19 before Bleach Green, then another 30+ run up the bank to Greenisland and 40 down through Clipperstown. Time was 36'40" to the Excursion platform, with every sign that the engine was just getting better and better with each run.

Next day NIR had chartered the train and in preparation the engine was turned following arrival of the second down special. Now chimney first for the 16.03 to Belfast, 131's time of 11'22" from Whitehead Excursion to pass Carrick was the best so far. A steady 40 between Kilroot and Barn was followed by another 30m/h climb of Mount bank, but we were stopped by signals at Bleach Green. Even so, total time was 39'22"

**WEDNESDAY 4 APRIL: NIR 50:** Today 131 had a prestige job, working from Great Victoria Street to Whitehead celebrating NIR's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, crew Noel Playfair and Gary Moore, with Inspector Paul Hoy. Driver David Haire of Derry, a prospective steam trainee, was with them to observe. Our support crew was Phil Lockett and Ryan Downey.

Noel took the empty train quietly up to Central where 131 was detached and ran ahead to Central Junction. GM 112 was to have come from York Road and take the train on to GVS, 131 then backing in from where she had been waiting at CL503. A sharp departure was scheduled for 10.55 but arrangements fell totally asunder and it was a rather less than happy crew that eventually got the road from GVS 60 minutes late, on a cold and miserable morning of persistent rain.

After a pick-up stop at Central, Noel took us very confidently out to The Bridges. On first valve and well wound out she went over Lagan Junction in 1'57" doing 12½, the fastest start of the three days. We caught signals at Bleach Green, but another very good climb followed, sustaining 34 on the 1/97 before Greenisland. Time from Central to a signal stop at Whitehead NIR was 34'12". That afternoon there was an empty carriage movement to York Road to collect "Dutch Van" 462 after wheel turning. Coming back to Whitehead with 7 bogies, Noel tried the big valve up to Greenisland. 131 loved it - holding 155lbs against both injectors with steady firing, the front damper open and the back damper shut. The Great Northern dictum of "throw them well over and pull them up" still seemed to work!

**131 RENAISSANCE: TUESDAY 15 MAY:**  
The final day of the May tour gave 131 an itinerary including both Antrim and Bangor and would have been a historic 'first' visit of a Q-class to the BCDR Bangor branch, with Noel Playfair, Gary Moore and Inspector Paul Hoy in command. With the 40m/h limit still in force, the only noteworthy feature of the run up to Belfast was the climb of the Mount bank. But signals at Trooperslane brought us briefly into single figures - another disappointment. On the tender first run to Antrim a bout of slipping led to further substantial delay, and before we returned to Lisburn, Control cancelled the Bangor leg. A great shame, as much interest centred on how 131 would handle Holywood bank.

The run back from Antrim was without incident, 50 minutes, allowed 52, to Lisburn with a brief max of 32 at post 5. 19'57" Lisburn to Central, then on to Carrickfergus in 23'04", 40 out the shore, followed by a decent climb to Greenisland, with min of 31. As will be seen, much better was to follow!

### **PORTRUSH FLYER: SUNDAY 12 AUGUST:**

With her 60m/h certification finally complete, 131's Portrush Flyer debut was eagerly anticipated. These were her longest run to date. The load was limited to 6MK2s, though Gary Moore later reckoned 131 could easily have managed seven bogies.

Some of the best-ever performances of 4-4-0s on the NCC has been with 85 "Merlin" over the past four years, and of course 131 cannot be directly compared with a much bigger engine. 85 blows off at 215 lbs and 131 at 175. 85's grate area is 25.22 sq ft against 131's 19.9, and her total heating surface is 1534 sq ft compared with 131's 1285. Nevertheless, 131 was able to punch above its weight on the NCC main line.

On the first Flyer Gary Moore made an outstanding climb to Kingsbog. The start from platform 4 at Central to Lagan Junction is a tight one, and we were over the Junction in 2'16" - equalling three of 85's starts last year. There was a brisk 53 max before Whitehouse, and then they really dug into the climb, with pressure rising from 150lbs at the bottom of the bank to 160lbs against the injector before the top. The time from Whiteabbey to Kingsbog was 8'53" and the min of 30 at Mossley West equalled most of 85's recent climbs and



*Working its Portrush Flyer debut with Gary Moore in charge, No.131 works hard out of Ballymena on 12<sup>th</sup> August. Space is now severely restricted, so one photo only, but No.131 is prominent elsewhere! (Photo: C Friel)*

even slightly bettering three!

The time from Whiteabbey to Mossley was 5'54". A time of 18'18" to pass Kingsbog compared well with two similar 85 2016 Flyer season times; in three other runs 85 was less than a minute faster. 85's best was 16'24" on 19 June 2016, involving a faster start from Belfast and a higher speed at post 2.

Time to Antrim was 35'22" allowed 36, with 59 max at Dunadry. There was no need to go any harder, as the "Flyer" has to wait here to cross the 11.05 ex Portrush. Forward from Antrim, the nonstop run to Coleraine took 63'02" as against 60 allowed, but the loss of time can be debited to the signaller mistakenly set the route through Ballymena's down platform, meaning braking to 15 on approach.

The restart from Antrim begins with a

brief climb; as soon as 131 was eased, she blew off! Time to pass Cookstown Junction was 5'44; within 30 seconds of a typical 85 run. 85 typically did 60 at Kellswater, where 131 was doing 52. Due to the way the road was set, we took 18'36" to pass Ballymena and I estimate this cost 2½ minutes of time, as well as losing momentum for the pull up to Galgorm. 16½ minutes from Ballymena saw 131 through Killagan, the slight loss of time working to the crew's advantage as the 11.38 ex-Derry was already there and a stop in the loop avoided. With a permanent restriction to 40 after post 47¾, a 13-minute timing from Ballymena to Killagan Loop is rather tight. Killagan to Coleraine took a few seconds under the 28 allowed. The almost never-ending restrictions at the Twin Arches and between Ballymoney and Macfin, really take the edge off any running, but 131 managed a sprightly

56 at Dunloy, 53 down Ballyboylan bank, and 53 again on the run down toward Windy Hall.

On the return journey, 131's time of 5'16" to the Two Mile Bridge was only about ten seconds slower than a typical 85 run in 2017. The speed of 37 was, though, a bit slower than the Compound's typical 45. A possible check on the approach to Ballymoney brought us down to 28, but we were up to 40 again at the station. Given the size differential with 85, we were doing well to pass Ballyboylan crossing at 43 but there was no point rushing to Killagan, with its 8-minute crossing stop, and our 31'36" was just two minutes over schedule. The down trains were all going well, so we left Killagan right time. 55 round the Dunminning Curves was nice work, with 46 over the hump at Dromona, passing Ballymena in 14'34" and then a 58 before shut-off for the slack near Magherabeg.

We started the climb of the bank doing 42 through Antrim, but 131 was a bit harder-pressed. 51 at Muckamore made me wonder if we could hold the magic 40 at the top of the hill. A valiant 48 at Templepatrick fell back to the thirties on the last part of the climb. Water was the problem as the injectors were proving temperamental that evening. A min of 33 at Kingsbog was no disgrace. A signal coming into Central cleared quickly but made for a slow run to the platform. 30½mins pass to stop from Antrim was very satisfactory for a first ever.

#### **PORTRUSH FLYER: SUNDAY 19**

**AUGUST:** The down run was not quite up to the previous week but was by no

means bad; my 1965 and 1966 logs with "Jeeps" and six-bogies show quite a number which fell to lower minima! I reckon 131's min on the 19th may represent the average of what we'll get in the future – time will tell! Signal stops at Ballymena and Ballymoney spoiled any chance of a good climb of Galgorm bank and dampened any chance of a sprint towards Macfin. At Coleraine, Gary was quietly fuming at his signalling colleagues! Coming back was brighter, greatly helped by the perfect behaviour of the injectors. It was found that Gresham & Craven, who provided the injectors, recommended closing the water valve before the steam valve when the injector was being turned off. There is logic here; if the injector is closed while its body is full of cold water there is less likelihood of overheating.

We were doing 41 at the Two Mile Bridge, against 37 last week, and by Macfin the difference was 39 seconds. A quick scan through my own 1960s logs revealed no less than forty runs which were slower from Coleraine to Macfin! The bark of 131's exhaust up Ballyboylan bank that night was spine-tingling and 47m/h at the Crossing was quite exceptional for a four-coupled engine. To my great surprise, a look at 85's runs over the last four years revealed only two doing a slightly higher speed here; and those with five bogies.

The other section of great interest was from Antrim up to Kingsbog. Last year we had probably the best work ever done in this section by a four-coupled engine when, in three successive weeks, 85 went over Kingsbog at 61, 56½ and

55½. So, I reckoned in advance that for a Q class the mid-forties were realistically the best we may expect. I was delighted to find that it turned out to be exactly so.

I received an email from James Friel confirming that 131 was worked very economically on the climb. Indeed, from the front coach he wondered whether the regulator had been partly closed during the climb! He later discovered that Gary had been steadily reducing the cut on the ascent to Kingsbog and this took me back again to Bob Clements's analysis of the boiler and firebox. This run from Antrim to Kingsbog certainly bore out the received wisdom of old Great Northern drivers that "throw them over and pull them up" was the best recipe for a Q. Here is a footplate view of 131's second "Flyer" – very much in line with comments quoted earlier about the legendary Q class power and economy:

*"On the climb up from Antrim, the engine was wound very close to mid gear, yet still seemed to climb well. From a fireman's point of view the engine was perfect for the entire run. She responded well to a fire in the back and sides, leaving the front covered enough but not over-fired. The front damper at 75% and the back shut entirely. This allowed the pressure to be controlled using the flap on the firehole door using secondary air. The injectors were perfect. Each picked up with no problems and that certainly helped."*

**STEAM & JAZZ: FRIDAY 31 AUGUST:**  
Considerable interest attached to this as 131 had seven bogies, an interesting nonstop section from Lisburn to

Whitehead with no Larne line service ahead and the rare experience of passing through Central nonstop. I have timed all three of our working engines (4, 85 and 131) on this section, which is rather tightly timed at 48 minutes – only one of them managed to keep the schedule!

The start out of Lisburn was not unduly rushed. After signals around Adelaide, we passed Central in 17'35" before a minimum of 15 from the platforms towards Lagan Junction; the best of the Jazz runs. We had a careful run, not exceeding 50 before Whitehouse; Noel was holding back in the hope of a clear run through Jordanstown but signals brought us down to 23 after Whiteabbey. Since the steam Boat Trains always had a clear road and only a 50 restriction over Bleach Green Junction, a min of 40 was not really on the cards. I reckon, though, that our min of 37 was outstanding. The job was apparently done on the big valve with the cut off at the 'fourth mark'. Back on to the small valve and pulled up a bit, 131 flew down the bank through Carrickfergus, right up to the 60 limit. Our time from passing Greenisland to passing Carrick was 3'14". Looking at five of Mac Arnold's boat train logs in "Steam over Belfast Lough" I found only one better time, with "Jeep" 55, and four runs which were slower!

The Q class had disappeared from the main line long before today's NIR steam men began their railway careers. But their years of experience and instinctive 'feel' for a new engine have given us a great sense of anticipation for the future.

## “Goods work on the GNR(I)” Interviews with Billy McQuade and Jimmy Donnelly

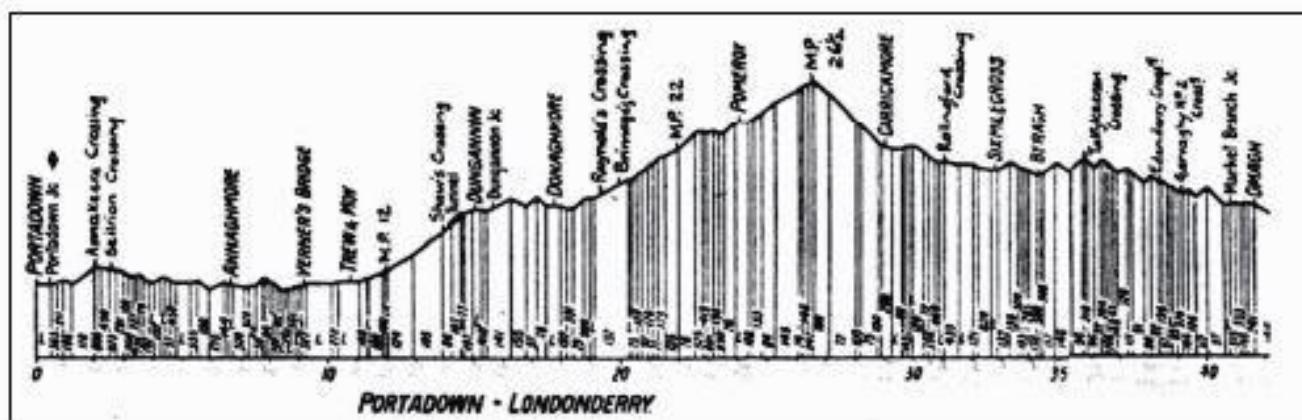
Compiled by P.J. Lockett

In 2008, the RPSI Youth Squad was completing the overhaul of GNR(I) brake van No.81 at Whitehead. The overhaul project had consolidated a core team of younger volunteers at Whitehead and was instrumental in developing their engineering skills, skills that are still in use in maintaining our fleet today. Whilst the physical restoration of the brake van was continuing, I was fortunate to be able to interview two former GNR(I) railwaymen and discover more about working goods trains from the perspective of both the footplate and the brake van. I've typed up the story using the men's own words, however, to aid logical flow, I've changed the order in which the two men told me their stories.

**Jimmy Donnelly started on the railway on the 8th September 1947 as an engine cleaner in Portadown.**  
"Then from that, at that time, you were getting firing turns whenever you'd been there for maybe 2 or 3 months.

You got a firing turn which was recorded and when you had 365 firing turns you got a fireman's rate. Your wages were 38 shillings as an engine cleaner and lodgings were £1 a week. Then you got onto night work which meant cleaning out ashpans and brushing down footplates and apron plates and keeping the engine generally tidy for the driver and fireman coming in in the morning. Then you developed from that when the fireman might say to you 'throw a wee drop of oil round that'. You might have been there for 4 or 5 months at that stage and that was part of your training too, in an off-hand way. They didn't mind you doing that because you were mad to get on the shovel and get out on the main road.

So, a driver would say 'would you take that fella Donnelly with you there and go to Dungannon with an outserve special'. [Ed note: an outserve special is a special train, not listed in the Working Timetable. The crews all wanted these



You may find a gradient profile useful for this, the Portadown-Omagh section of the Derry Road. Other lines are mentioned throughout, but – when you bear in mind there were also sharp curves along with the prolonged gradients and sawtooth sections – these 42 miles provided the stiffest of tests for a loose-coupled goods train. A descent was every bit as challenging as a steep climb. Then throw the weather in! (Courtesy J Cassells)

*[specials because they accrued overtime payment.] This might have been that they wanted empty wagons at Coalisland for sand or a stock special going to Dungannon Fair or Omagh Fair. These weren't the most important trains, but the driver who was there would have taken a young man with him (he hadn't much other option)! There were the drivers who wouldn't do that and wanted a real fireman with them, but you have to start somewhere and that's where we started. From lighting up engines with the steamraiser you knew how to put on injectors before you were a fortnight about the place and you'd have been helping the older men – an education for you.*

In fact, I can remember my first firing turn. I went on an outserve special to Omagh with a driver called Billy Chambers on a big D engine, No.117, and it was a real experience! Billy was one of 'those people' and the engine seemed to make steam whenever he

was there, I don't know if it was how he smiled at it or something! He would have given you a free hand and you could have shovelled away and any problems that you got into he could overcome them for you. I remember I felt great coming back from that. On the way home we stopped at Pomeroy, my own home village, and the station chargehand Herbie Wallace was there with his daughter, a lovely girl. I was the big fireman going back to Portadown, which was like going to New York from there, a small village in the 1940's! It was certainly the highlight of my early career and a great start from which to develop over the years."

**Billy McQuade started on the railway as a number taker, aged 14, in 1946.**

"I went to Belfast and passed the exam and then a week or so after, got word to go for a medical at the top of Great Victoria Street and then a few weeks after that got word to start. I did holiday relief and then started in Omagh as a



*The guard of the 1.50pm goods from Dungannon walks from his 20-ton brake van towards UG No.146 at Coalisland on 11<sup>th</sup> May 1957 to discuss the upcoming shunt. He carries a shunting pole, to unhook wagons without having to get in between vehicles. If it's a photo of the fireman's side of a GNR(I) engine in company days, the slacker bag will often be hanging out of the cab. (Photo: D Donaldson)*

number taker. 8pm to 5am for 4 years. I don't see any young fella today who would do it. I used to take down the numbers of every wagon going through Omagh at night for Enniskillen, Bundoran, Donegal you name it; it all went through Omagh.

At 20 I was transferred, because I became a man, to Lisnaskea and I was lodging in Lisnaskea and I was classed as a porter signalman at Lisnaskea. I used to have to be in Lisnaskea for the first goods train, the 5.10 out of Enniskillen in the morning. Then some change took place and after a year there I got transferred into Enniskillen to the shunting. Now, whenever I heard I was going to Enniskillen, my brother was the foreman and I took a notion that I didn't want to work in Enniskillen with my brother. So, I put in for a transfer and I got transferred to Portadown on the 6th day of March 1950 as an assistant shunter. I still have the transfer letter which says 'report to RV Turkington, stationmaster Portadown station goods yard for 82 and 6 a week, £4 half a crown.' I was lodging in Hanover street in Portadown. The lodgings were £1.10 a week. There wasn't much left to take home to my mother I can tell you! I did 17 years at the shunting and then I got out as a Guard."

**Like Billy, Jimmy also worked from different towns in the country.**

"After working in Enniskillen and Omagh, I eventually ended up back in Portadown as a Fireman. I was in the Goods link firing then with the one driver for about 6 years. We did 9 months in the link and 3 months spare

(covering all other jobs- you could have been on a passenger train or a goods train or a mixed train or a shunting engine or shed jobs). We did the two Goods trains to Derry at night, the 1205 and 0115 in the morning and you booked off on one of them in Derry. You'd be there at 0500 in the morning and left again at 1915 in the evening and back in Portadown at 0200. You did that 3 nights in the week. 3 days away from home and 3 nights at home. We slept in the railway caravan at Foyle Road, we called it the "Foyle View Hotel"! The next week you did the 0705 to Dundalk in the morning and the 1440 goods in the evening. All goods trains. That was that month and you went round that again for another month and another month. The next month would be the 0350 to Newry morning Goods and the 0315 to Omagh, 0445 to Carrickmore and the 0535 to Armagh Goods trains. That was that month. Then the 1915 to Belfast at night, 0905 to Dundalk in the morning Goods trains, 0600 sand train to Coalisland and the 1440 sand train to Belfast alternative for 9 months. Then 3 months spare, covering for sick and that. They had a rule that if someone went off sick and you covered then you stayed there (if the Driver let you) and you stayed in that link until he came back again.

Most of the turns were at night, the 0905 to Dundalk was about the nicest job. If you were on a middle turn or free time you could still get away to the pictures or a dance hall of a Sunday night. You could get to the pictures a couple of nights a week when you were

on the early turn. It was a great life!

You came in and looked at the shed notice to see who the driver was with you. You'd have the keys to your locker and his locker and you'd get your tools out and put them on the engine. You'd gone to the foreman and he'd told you what engine you were getting. Let's say this is the 0315 to Omagh and we have 109, a converted D, generally a thing that was hard to get along with! So, you went away up the shed and got that ready. Oiled it and ran it out onto the table. The driver would have been in by this time and checked the sandboxes, oiled the crank and stoked up the fire and got her generally up in steam and filled the tank. Ready to go. Down to the disc and you rang the signalman and he'd have let you go down against the train. Up would come the Guard when you were down on the train and he'd have said "equal 45", that was the load between Portadown and Omagh. Equal 45 was for crossing purposes with other trains at the small stations. You didn't stop then before Dungannon where you might have dropped a wagon off and taken on a drop of water. Then you'd head on to a crossing point. Generally, they'd put you down into the siding at Pomeroy if there was a passenger train coming. That would be a lie up for an hour. Then you'd go on to

Omagh and hook the engine off. You'd run down to the shed, turn the engine and left it ready for the next crew. You'd then come back passenger to Portadown arriving at about 0930 or 1000. Another crew would travel up from Portadown to Omagh to work the train back."

**Jimmy explained to me what the Guard was doing whilst Jimmy was preparing his locomotive.**

"The Guard would have been taking the numbers of the wagons and where they were all for. If you were going on cross border stuff there were a lot of extra papers for the customs in Dundalk. Any of those wagons, for example from Strabane or Donegal to Dublin would have been all sealed and wouldn't have been opened until they went to the south again. They had to have papers for all of them and for customs, they were very exact about that. In fact, they would search us too, taking the lid off our tea and sugar box to see if there was any jewellery and checking our lockers and frisking us for English papers (which weren't allowed). There was one big customs man in Dundalk who commented on my fitness one day and the driver said to me, "get you away up into the tender tomorrow morning and he'll not be fit to climb after you to search you!"



Here UTA 5G3 (a 'Big D') No.33, (GNR(l) No.20) lifts the Portadown to Omagh goods out of the siding at Pomeroy on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1964. (Photo: EM Patterson)

The Guard would have been allowed 45 minutes to get his train ready. The Inspector, 2 shunters, a number taker and examiner would have got the train ready before it left. Every wagon and where it was for was all noted in books. We carried anything and everything, coal, meal, mail, bread, ammunition, everything that was. It was very enjoyable in comparison to passenger working. There were many funny incidents. We used to bring the papers too and whilst we'd have been shunting the signalman would have been doing out his bets for us to put on for the next day. It was all more relaxed. Most of the drivers were first class. I can remember a signalman at Belleek who was always asking us to put bets on. When he would be writing his bet out the Driver would touch the instrument in his box and then Castle Caldwell signalman

would be ringing through to see what he wanted! Little amusements like that made the days very enjoyable."

**Billy concurred;** "So, the roster said you're on the 9.40 tonight or whatever and you'd take all the numbers of all the wagons. You knew what you had on. You had to be careful about the odd foreman looking to overload the engine. You'd only be allowed 45 to Omagh and he'd love to push 48 on. The point here was supposing the engine wasn't fit to go over the bank and they came out to see why and you'd have let him? You could nearly tell to look at the engine if they could take a few extra. There were some old bad ones. The train was made up by the shunters in the goods yard. So, you'd find the Derrys against the van and then the next ones is the Strabanes and then next would have been your

Omaghs and Enniskillens and then the line for along the road, Pomeroy, Beragh, Sixmilecross. You then tell the crew what he has and what way me and you's going to work. "Look here you have 38 or 45 on and there's a few heavies, loco coal next the van or a couple of oil tankers down next the van" and he'd be satisfied enough.

I would have been booked out on a train; there were several left Portadown in the night. You could have been on the Cookstown one, or down to Belfast and work another train back up, or on the road to Omagh. My equipment was my case, my flags (green and red), all my books and journals and timetables and my packet of 12 detonators. When you broke down in the middle of the night outside in the country there was nothing, only you! Or if you were involved in a break away and the engine went on into Omagh not knowing he had broken away, then maybe after half an hour or nearly an hour you'd hear him whistling coming back, your job was to go and protect your train. You'd have been standing away back and you'd hear all sorts of sounds in the fields at night. At bridge 101, the mental hospital in Omagh was on the right-hand side on the way to Omagh and an awful lot of patients lost their lives there."

**We were particularly keen to know what the inside of our GNR(I) brake van (now nicknamed "Ivan") should look like and contain. Billy was able to tell us.** "In the van there is very little. There is one very important thing inside that van. There was a wee potbellied stove and you filled it with coal and

you'd have it lit before you left and man it was red with the heat! You'd sit down in there writing up the times the train went through places and you'd say to yourself I wonder where I am now. I could have told every inch of the way without leaving the van, by the sound of the track. 'I'm coming near Annaghmore now, I should be passing the distant signal now'....great stuff! Nothing stored in her. A bench seat and you might have got coal or sticks in there. Nothing on the wall. No such things as fire extinguishers. No desk. The vans were all grey on the outside. To see in the van you held your oil lamp under your arm and you kept your lamp in your locker.

They'd a lovely uniform they gave us. Everybody had their tie on. When you're at the shunting, getting in to hook up wagons and screw up couplings as we called it, there'd be a lot of oil and you got oil all over you. When you were at the shunting you got the loveliest corduroy trousers, all lined from the very ankles up and corduroy waistcoat and a coat, a dark coat, wasn't corduroy, but double breasted. When you went to bed at night in the lodging house and you took off your corduroy trousers, with the oil and grease they stood up themselves!"

**I asked Jimmy if firing a Goods train was very different to firing on Passenger trains.**

"No not a lot. A lot depended on the driver you were with and the coal that you had. Sometimes you'd need to water the coal, if a driver had had a row before he left the house or wasn't in the

best of shape, you'd have to keep everything ship-shape for them! But once you got going, you were young and nothing was a bother to you, in fact you'd have shovelled the tender of coal twice if it made things pleasant for everyone around you! You'd have stopped along the road and had tea. You'd have your own tea can with you and two cups. If you had anything that you wanted to warm, say a sandwich or something you put it up behind the regulator and by the time you got to Pomeroy or Carrickmore and while you were waiting on the mail train coming you could have boiled your can and had your tea sitting there. You put the can on the picker for the fire and boiled your can up – faster than an electric kettle you know. You had your tea and sugar box. Some drivers would bring a bottle with a cork in it instead. We used to get kippers on a Friday when you were going to Coalisland and we'd have put them on the shovel and warmed them. I didn't fry much on the shovel but there were fellas who were really good at it. They'd have got the hose and had the shovel really shining, put a bit of bacon and egg in it and put it half in the fire and had the whole thing bubbling straight away.

**Billy explained the working of trains to me.**

"In the dark the crew had their gauge lamp on the engine and they could have given you a green light. And we'd have given an odd green light every now and then, especially starting out of Portadown at night and you're away out round the junction cabin, the next thing you gave your green light and he'd give

you a blurt of the whistle to show he knew you were in your van, that was you correct. If he wanted to stop in an emergency or whatever he would just stop. But if you wanted him to stop, the only way you could stop him was the handbrake. And he'd have known it was on after some considerable period of time and he'd be wondering what was wrong.

At Pomeroy you might back the boy into the siding and waited until other trains had passed and then you proceeded. The Guard was always on his own. No one was really allowed to travel with him.

If you had a passenger guard, he couldn't put screw couplings on a goods train. You put them on on a shunting pole, there was a knack to doing it! It was nice to do one, but you see the second one! You didn't carry it with you, nearly every station would have one.

The ride was very, very good. Even with clickety clack. That's how you knew where you were. I mind dozing off one night and other guards found the same situation, but when you wakened up you might have only been snoozing for a few minutes. When you wakened up you didn't know whether you were going forward or backwards!

**I asked Jimmy if the Guard and footplate crew would often talk.**

"Some of them would have come up. If we'd been lying there for any length of time they would have come up. Some would never bother with you. It was a long walk. Let's say you were on a

Goods train at night, say the 0040 from Portadown to Belfast and you stopped outside Lurgan with 65 wagons, the Guard would have to walk that to hook off whatever was staying at Lurgan and hook on whatever was going. That meant you were at Lurgan nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour and by the time he walked back to the van again he gave you the green light from the van that everything was ship shape to go. You probably went to Moira and did it all again. You'd stop outside the gates at Moira and the Guard would put the brake on. He'd come down then and hook off whatever there was and put them in the siding. It was the Guards duty to do that. The same then coming back up again on the 0425 goods from Belfast in the morning you would have had the bread for Moira and you stopped outside Moira and hooked the bread off and left it on the running road. You would run away out and run round it and then pull it back out and into the siding again. Then

you'd go back onto the train. The Guard would have the brake on in the van to hold the whole lot there. We would have done the same at Lurgan again, with a lot of coal for Lurgan and bread for Lurgan too. There was a coal merchants that would get 20 or 30 wagons of coal all the time there.

The brakes were generally all very good on the vans. The examiners would have checked them regularly and used the adjusting bar to keep brakes close in to the wheels."

**Billy recalled an amusing encounter with one footplate crew.**

"One morning I remember getting up on an engine, he was a bit late down, and he was a wee bit of a pernickety class of a driver, this boy. In Belfast all of them drivers was gentlemen, but not this boy in particular. So I says 'what's kept you, you should have been away?' 'Never mind you he says; get you into



*NCC Mogul No.99 'King George VI' has the signal at Balmoral for the Third Road through Adelaide and into Grosvenor Road Goods Yard with its train from Portadown. The NCC tablet catcher on the cabside is prominent, suggesting Portrush was still occasionally on the itinerary. Let's hope the driver took the right engine this time! (Photo: J Richardson, CP Friel Collection)*

your box!' 'Alright.' But when I'm getting down the other side of the engine because I'd got up on his side, I says 'what's that contraption there for?' 'Ohhhhh!' he nearly had a heart attack! The fireman the same! 'Oh Gawd, hook me off, hook me off' he says, 'I've took the wrong engine!' This engine was for the Portrush road with a staff catcher on the side!"

**Jimmy commented on the nature of communications with the Guard:**

"The only way to communicate with the Guard whilst running was to blow the whistle repeatedly. That would have got him to look out and you could then have signalled back to him to put the brake on. The driver would have done that. That was an alarm call. There were codes of calls with the whistle. It was well used in Enniskillen where the signalman couldn't see what the shunt was doing. It was like a blackbird singing all night! Just like Park Road in Portadown, I don't know how people slept with the noise of the Goods Yard. Christmas Day would have been about the only day when it stopped.

It was a primitive way of working. We might acknowledge a green light from the Guards oil lamp with a whistle, but on a stormy light the Guards lamp might have blown out and we'd have been alright with sight of the white lights of the van. If there were problems, you might have scribbled a note and tied it to a lump of coal and thrown it out to the signalman for passing on ahead of the train. The bush telegraph!"

**The use of oil lamps was a strong memory of Billy's as well.**

"On the guard's van were side lamps. You changed them over depending on the direction you were travelling. The drivers and us railwaymen must have had great sight in those days. There was only a wee calsy wick in that there burning calsy oil [*Ed: calsy=kerosene*]. The like of that wouldn't be allowed these days. Even when we were shunting, the driver would have been away maybe 40 or 50 wagon lengths away and we were wagging our lamp and what was it? Just a bit of calsy oil and a wick! And they could see us."

**Billy told me about a typical journey from the Guards perspective.**

"Screw couplings....you could have run from Belfast to Portadown on a single screw coupling, hanging it onto the next hook. But when you were going onto the Derry road you'd have hung on the other hook onto that too, make it a double coupling. Just in case of breakaways with the weight of the goods.

If you were leaving Belfast with a goods train at night you could have 65 or 70 wagons. You'd no braking to do at all in the van as the line was quite level. When you left Portadown junction for Londonderry, when you went the length of Annaghmore (the first station out of Portadown), when you came into Annaghmore distant signal you started to rub your brake, to get them nice and tight and get a good stretch on them. Because when you left Annaghmore station there was a place along the line called Drumnott, the wagons would have run in and snapped, but if you had the strain on the van that kept them

tight 'til he would have got up over that. Then when you knew he was climbing again you took it off and on he went."

[Editorial note: the appendix to the 1930 Working Timetable set's rules for the section of line that Billy is describing. The wording of the rules are as follows:

"TRAIN-GOODS-BETWEEN  
ANNAGHMORE AND VERNERSBRIDGE -  
WORKING OF."

*The attention of Drivers and Guards is specially directed to the following regulations for the safe working of Goods Trains over this section of Line, which must be strictly observed, viz:-*

Trains from Annaghmore Direction.

*Drivers to steam all the way. Guards to apply brake slightly at Indication Post adjoining 71/2 mile post, and gradually increase to practically full pressure so that the couplings may be taut before descending gradient at Bridge No.18,*

*brake to be kept in this position till train arrives at 83/4 Mile Post approaching Canal Bridge No.20 when brake me be released for remainder of journey to Dungannon.*

Trains from Vernersbridge Direction.

*Drivers to steam all the way. Guards to apply brake slightly at Indication Post adjoining 9 miles post, and gradually tighten to practically full pressure, ease after Van is on rising grade beyond Canal Bridge No.20, and tighten gradually so that couplings may be taut before getting to top of rising gradient at Bridge No.18; brake to be eased after passing Bridge No.17.]*

Back to Billy's story, "Your next call then was going into Dungannon. There was about a mile long tunnel into Dungannon station. Whenever you were passing out as a Guard the only part of the railway that you had to carry a handlamp at all times was on the



Having left the station siding in the earlier photo, UTA SG3 No.33 skirts below Pomeroy village and prepares for the final assault of the bank up to MP26 1/2. The descent of the other side, the Carrickmore bank, would be steep and prolonged. To prevent the wagons bumping into each other on the descent the guard, at some point once No.33 disappears over the top, will partially apply his van's handbrake (to give a 'rub') to keep the couplings taught, before picking his moment to release it for the next climb. (Photo: EM Patterson)

Derry Road. The Inspector would say "what would you carry on the Derry Road that you wouldn't necessarily carry on any other line", the answer was your handlamp, why? Because if you broke down in that tunnel you needed to be able to see where you were going. Through Dungannon, the next problem was Donaghmore. You're flying through Donaghmore, bad dip, you got her on again and once he got going you knew to take it off and off you went again to Pomeroy. When you went through Pomeroy you were going to Carrickmore and there was a terrible bank down. You could have looked down your train there at night and seen the sparks flying out of the engine and the sparks were flying out of your van because you were holding too to get down that big of a gradient. Then when you were through, you eased off again and away you went. Through Sixmilecross, into Beragh. Then through onto Omagh, which was a 20min run. The next situation after Beragh was at Tattykeeran, there was a gatehouse there and a terrible dip in the line there and you had to get her stretched out for there. Then you took the brake off again and then down through Garvaghy there was 2 gatehouses and you were coming to the famous 101 bridge. Several breakaways at it. Some drivers were very crafty at this place. Even the guard knew how to keep them. If the wagons ran in on that engine then they'd fall back hard on the other side. Some drivers leaving Portadown would say to you "whenever I get to 101 bridge, don't you touch nothing. You just leave her to me". They would have come down onto that stretch and they could have stopped

her, lifted her nice and gently again and away and nothing broke. Then you went into Omagh and the trainload into Omagh with a class D engine was 45 wagons, a class C 38 and a B, 33. Whenever you went on from Omagh you could increase there to 65 to Derry, no banks nothing, straight run in. Going on then you might stop off at say Newtownstewart to leave off bread. That's where the van came in. You'd have to put your brake on tight and then the engine would leave the train and shunt the bread and the train wouldn't run away. All these stations had a bit of a gradient at them."

**I asked Jimmy what it was like on the footplate of these Goods trains.**

"You needed to know the road well. That's where we had the advantage. I was firing for over 20 years and I knew all the roads. I'd have loved to get driving steam over the Derry Road. I drove all over the Midland roads, but that Derry Road was up and down like a switch back and I knew all the way to work them. The Guard had an understanding with the driver, who'd have said "would you give me a rub at 101 bridge" and that meant put the brake on so that they wouldn't break away. There were always Guards who'd have their own idea about how they would work and couldn't agree with the driver. Most of the drivers would have said "just you leave that brake alone and I'll work this my way". So, let's take a train from Annaghmore. After leaving Annaghmore the Guard would have put the brake on, just a slight rub, not full on or he would have nearly stopped the train. As you go through Annaghmore



*The view from the front of the 5.26pm ex Omagh at Vernersbridge on 28th July 1964. This illustrates the return journey of that described by Jimmy, with Drumnott climbing in front of us. (Photo: EM Patterson)*

you go up over the top of Drumnott, it's a switch-back, and you fall down into Vernersbridge. He would have had that brake on as hard as he could when going up the hill, to keep the chains taught, no slackness. Then when he got through Vernersbridge he could take them off again because they were out of the hole again. It was like having a towbar on a motor car, the Guards job was to keep the whole train rigid.

If the Guard didn't put the brake on until the top of the hill, then the wagons would have been going too fast down the hill and he'd have had to pull them all back again to get the chains taught. That risked a breakaway as you would have had anything up to 3 or 400 ton pulling at one chain. Some Guards were maybe afraid to put it on and didn't put it on hard enough. I can remember one night breaking away as we pulled the

drawbar out of an old Sligo and Leitrim cattle wagon. We ended up having to run round and push the train into the Moy to get the whole thing sorted out again. We knew because the Guards van wasn't there anymore and we would have kept a look out for them. There were actually three lights on the Guards van, one in the middle and one on each side up above the door. The Driver would have said "have a wee look to see if they're all coming there" and you could look back and see the light, see that they were all together. Sometimes they weren't all together!

There were some lucky escapes. When oil or grease was cool in the wagon axleboxes, they wouldn't run as fast. When they were hot, after running all the way from Belfast, you could have pushed some of the wagons with your wee finger. I can remember a tank train,

the 0755 out of Maysfields broke away outside Omagh and the driver stopped. They were lucky no one was killed when the runaway vehicles ran into the back of them."

**It sounded like a lot of on the job experience was required. Billy confirmed.**

"You'd have learned the road from other guards. Andy Lawlor would have been one of my teachers. I can remember him taking me out the Dublin road in 1958 or so, to Scarva, stopped there. Run round to the Belfast end of the train and then right up into Banbridge. You lifted some goods wagons there at 1115 in the morning. You left Banbridge with the wagons and I can remember it so well, he says, "you'll be passing this perfume factory, you'll enjoy it". So we came on down and you know what the perfume factory was? Burn house at Knockmore! Dead horses (we used to take them by rail from stations too), cows and all. The smell of going past that place! That brought you out to

Lisburn. You picked up some wagons at Lisburn and then on down they switched you in at Balmoral to what they called the "third line" and that didn't interfere then with passenger trains running up and down to GVS. Then they switched you across to the site of what is now Belfast Central station. Now I used to go down at night with that van with specials of livestock, cattle. They were all shipped from Maysfields there. When you went down into where Central is now there was flag men for stopping the traffic and they could have brought you right across to the boat. And when the cattle were all loaded onto the boat, the wagons were all washed and sterilised and sent back the next morning. Whenever you were switched round at Central Junction, the signalman there would have put his hand up at you and held up the number of fingers of trains there were in front of you. There might have been two. So you went down under the permissive block system. So the man in front of me would have detonators down. He'd have



*SG2 No. 181 is on the Dromore Viaduct with the 2.08pm goods from Banbridge to Maysfields with Inglis and Hughes bread containers in plain view. The Editor remembers the reek of the burnhouse at Knockmore; dead animals were burnt there, up to and including a whale washed up in Larne. He thinks. (Photo: D Donaldson)*

his 6 fog signals down at quite a distance. When we hit them detonators, we knew we were coming up against another one, so we'd crawl up to him. Now, my worry was, as soon as he stopped, I've my detonators out and away back in case the next fella was going to come down! It was a great, great life altogether!"

**Jimmy commented on the team work that made a train a success.** "It only takes 3 people to work a goods train. The works all done in the Goods yard before we leave. You might have had bread and goods for every station to Derry and they have them shunted in rotation on the train. This would have taken into account what siding freight was for. For example, on one side of Pomeroy, it was fine to have the wagon next the engine and the Guard could put the brake on so the train wouldn't run away. On the other side, you'd have had to pin down the brakes, run round

the train and pick up the van and whatever wagon was to be dropped off and shunt it. The Guard did all the brake application, the pinning down and the coupling and uncoupling. The Guard would come up and tell us what was to be done and Firemen might have helped him to shorten proceedings and give us more time for a cup of tea!"

I was very privileged that these men had given their time to tell me about their working lives. I asked them if they had enjoyed their work.

**Jimmy said** "If I could go back I'd do goods work over passenger work. It was a great old life with great characters met along the way."

**Billy said** "If anybody gave me a rubber and I could rub myself out and I could start all over again, then it wouldn't be the railway of today, I'd join the GNR. It was well run, great men."



As seen in Eric T. Challoner's book 'Farewell the Derry Road', the crew of SG No.175 pose with the smartly dressed Guard on the end of the GNR platform at Cookstown on 07<sup>th</sup> August 1957; the 3 lines in front swing to the right to Dungannon, the 4<sup>th</sup> line is one of 2 connections to the NCC. (Photo: EM Patterson)



Ruth Mackie writes; Rita Henderson was for the best part of 40 years the public face of the RPSI. Anyone who has ever wandered along the train to the diner and bought a cup of tea and a Kit-Kat (other chocolate bars are available) will have met Rita and felt her warmth and enthusiasm for looking after all who travelled on our trains.

She was always a special favourite with footplate crews and could be counted on to provide a restorative bacon roll or hot cup of strong coffee from the slightly frightening filter coffee maker. Many a weary steam raiser has had reason to thank Rita for a breakfast fry even if he would have to sit on a newspaper while he ate it to keep the coal dust from getting on the seats. *[The Editor remembers the joy of these fries in the wooden diner 87 as the train crossed the Dargan Bridge of a morning.]*

Rita was a formidable presence in the bar and took no nonsense from anyone,

either volunteer or passenger. As a teenager helping in the teabar I got a ticking off from her more than once for overfilling the milk jugs, which would then spill over when the ride got a bit bumpy. But once you knew Rita you rapidly realised that her bark was worse than her bite.

One of her great strengths was as a judge of people, many members including myself and my husband started out in the RPSI with a few turns in the diner before moving on to become committed members of catering, stewarding and other departments.

In recent years ill health meant Rita could no longer do as much as she wanted in 547 but the simple act of sitting in the teabar surrounded by lifelong friends and getting that blue tabard on brought her great joy and contentment. She will be greatly missed.

Eileen Armstrong now contributes a few lines; Rita was a true friend, everything required to be a true volunteer; reliable, honest, trustworthy, flexible and always had a smile and time for a chat with everyone. When her health declined in 2018 it was very difficult for Rita to understand that she couldn't cook anymore, and she challenged me on a few occasions. This all added to the excitement onboard 547. I miss her so much and she will be a hard act to follow. Gone but not forgotten.

All in the RPSI wish to pass our deepest condolences to her family.



